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## **THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN KERALA**

THE  
NATIONAL QUESTION  
IN  
KERALA

*E. M. S. NAMBOODRIPAD*

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## N O T E

KERALA : THE HOMELAND OF THE MALAYALEES, was the title of a book in Malayalam which I wrote in 1947 and which was published in the beginning of 1948. The first part of that book traced the history of Kerala down to the establishment of British authority and covered the same ground as is covered by Chapters II, III and IV and partly Chapter V of the present book. The second part of that book described the transformations in Kerala's social order which British rule brought about; that is covered by Chapters V and VI of the present book. The third part traced the origin and development of the National Democratic Movement of Kerala and covered the same ground as Chapters VII, VIII, IX and X of the present book.

Being the first effort to apply the general principles of Historical Materialism to the National Democratic Movement of Kerala, that book was bound to suffer from various discrepancies. I was myself conscious of the limitations of my attempt and hence, in my preface to that book, invited criticisms and suggestions from the public. Various friends offered those criticisms and suggestions to me, some of which took the form of polemical articles in the press. These criticisms and suggestions, as well as the general discussion that has been taking place during the last four years in the ranks of the Communist Party regarding the character, stage and class forces of the democratic revolution in India, helped me to see the inadequacies and fallacies of the various generalisations made by me in the original book. I, therefore, decided to completely revise it. The result of that revision is now being presented to the non-Malayalee public.

While writing the original book, I was seriously handicapped by the fact that there was not, to my knowledge at the time, anything in the authoritative works of Historical Materialism which would give the clue to the crucial problem of the history of Kerala—how and why the matriarchal family has continued to exist in Kerala down to the 20th century while it was superseded in all civilised countries in the cen-

turies before Christ? My book could not give a satisfactory solution to the problem. Since the publication of that book, however, I was able to study certain contributions by British Marxist historians (Thomson, Christopher Hill, Gordon Childe, etc.) on the problem of the replacement of the matriarchal by the patriarchal family in Greece and some other countries (in the columns of the *Labour Monthly* and *Modern Quarterly*). The study of these articles, together with a re-study of Engels' *Origin of the Family* and Marx's *Letters on India*, helped me to revise the understanding which formed the basis of the earlier parts of my book.

It was in the midst of this that Com. Stalin's celebrated work, *On Linguistics*, appeared and revolutionised scientific thought. His new teachings regarding Basis and Superstructure, the fact brought out by him that, far from being merely a mirror of the basis, the superstructure does very often act independently of the basis, and even influences the transformation of the basis, struck me as the guiding line for the student of Kerala's history whose job it is to explain such a mysterious phenomenon as the co-existence of the matriarchal family and a militarist-feudal State in mediaeval Kerala. This helped me to further revise my understanding.

Needless to say that the result of these revisions, as set out in the following pages, will evoke bitter criticism on the part of the champions of the traditional history of Kerala. It is natural that, rejecting, as I am doing, the basic understanding of both the Dravidian and Aryan schools of the traditional history of Kerala, I would be attacked by both. I would naturally welcome these attacks, since it is necessary for the proletarian point of view of history to come into conflict with the ruling class point of view. I am sure that, in exposing these ruling class points of view of history, I would have the cooperation of dozens of Marxist students of Kerala's history.

I would also welcome fraternal criticisms of Marxist historians of the point of view set forth in the following pages. I need not say that it is only through the process of intense discussion among Marxists that a correct understanding can be developed on the problems of Kerala's history.

E. M. S. NAMBOODRIPAD

Madras, May 24, 1952

## *Chapter I*

### INTRODUCTORY—DESCRIPTIVE

(1)

The Madrasi, or the South Indian, is, in the eyes of an ordinary North Indian, one type of Indian just like the Bengali, the Punjabi etc. The entire people of Madras or South India are to them the same. It is only recently, and that too among the politically-conscious sections of the North Indians, that the fact has become known that what are called the Madrasis or the South Indians are composed mainly of 4 nationalities—Andhra, Karnatak, Tamil and Malayalee—each of whom is as different from the other as the Bengali is from the Hindusthani or the Oriya or the Assamese, and as the Punjabi is from the Hindusthani, or the Sindhi, or the Gujerati.

It is therefore natural that the leaders of the Working Class and Democratic Movements in Northern India are not aware of the specific problems that their comrades in South India have to face. They are, for example, surprised to hear stories about the anti-Northern movement of the Dravida Kazhagam in Tamilnad, the tremendous mass response to the anti-Hindi slogans of the Kazhagam etc. Nor are they able correctly to assess the strength of feeling for an Andhra Province and its significance in the politics of Madras State. These and other problems of the mutual relations of the four major nationalities of Madras, among themselves as well as with the northern nationalities, have acquired such a vital importance in the national politics of India that it is idle to talk of building a National Democratic Front if the entire Indian Working Class and Democratic Movement does not pay close attention to them and help in their solution. To neglect them is to allow the reactionaries to fan national hatred and disrupt the unity of the common democratic movement of the Indian people.

It is as an effort to interpret the people and problems of one of these four major nationalities that I am giving in the following pages a brief description of the Malayalee people—their origin in the years of antiquity as far as can be ascertained, the development of their social order as far as can be traced and their present position and problems. It is hoped that comrades of the other three nationalities of Madras, as well as of all nationalities in India will interpret their own people and their problems, so that democrats and progressives all over India can better understand each other and, on the basis of this understanding, lay the necessary basis of “the unity of the peoples of the various nationalities of India not by force but by their voluntary consent to the creation of a common State”. (*Programme of the Communist Party of India.*)

## (2)

Kerala, as was mentioned earlier, is one of the four nationalities of South India.

It lies on the southwestern extremity of the Indian sub-continent and is the neighbour of Ceylon.

To its west lies the Arabian Sea and to the east, the Western Ghats. On its immediate south lie parts of Tamilnad and on its north live the Tulu, Coorg and other peoples who are generally considered to be part of Karnatak but who are really not entirely Kannadiga in national characteristics.

Kerala is politically divided into the Malabar District, parts of South Kanara and Nilgiri Districts (all, parts of Madras State) and the major part of the Travancore-Cochin State. The southern taluks of the latter State as well as Coorg and the whole of South Kanara and Nilgiri Districts are claimed to be part of Kerala by reactionaries in Kerala but this is a chauvinistic claim since South Travancore is certainly part of Tamilnad and since Tulu, Coorg and other peoples should be considered sub-nationalities closer to Karnatak than to Kerala.

The population of Kerala as defined above is 11,066,439 composed of 3,929,425 in Malabar, 342,301 in the Kerala part of South Kanara District, 34,246 in the Kerala part of Nilgiri District, and 6,760,467 in the Kerala part of the Travancore-Cochin State. It should however be made clear that the exact

boundary between Kerala on the one hand and Tamilnad, Tulu Nad, Coorg, etc., on the other are difficult to determine on the basis of census figures, as these figures are likely to err one way or another. (All figures are taken from the 1941 Census.)

The language of this area is *Malayalam*; in fact, it is on the basis of an exact definition of Kerala as "the contiguous part of Madras and Travancore-Cochin States where the mother tongue of the majority of the people is Malayalam" that the above boundaries and population of Kerala have been defined. This language is of Dravidian stock and closer to Tamil than the two other Dravidian languages (Telugu and Kanarese). It however has a greater admixture of Sanskrit than Tamil.

The people are called Malayalees; their culture is called Malayalee culture. Unlike most other nationalities in India, the land on the one hand and the people and their language on the other are known by different names—the land by the name of Kerala, the people by the name of Malayalee, and the language by that of Malayalam.

The land is divided in its physical features into three distinct regions: (1) The highlands touching the Western Ghats; (2) The plains which lie in between the highlands and the sea-coast; (3) The coastal belt. The first region abounds in vast forests and in tea, rubber, coffee and other plantations. In the middle region are grown paddy, tapioca, pepper, ginger and other crops. The coastal belt contains big cocoanut plantations, provides a big volume of fish, etc.

The staple food of the people is rice supplemented by tapioca, fish, etc. Rice however is not produced in sufficient quantity to serve the needs of the entire people, the difference between requirement and production being as high as about 50 per cent.

The people are divided in their social relationships into various castes, the caste system and inequality being far more acute than anywhere else in India. These castes may broadly be divided into (1) Caste Hindu, (2) non-Caste Hindu, (3) Scheduled Caste, (4) Muslim and (5) Christian. The populations of these respective castes are : Caste Hindu and non-Caste Hindu together 5,799,015; Scheduled Caste, 903,548; Muslim, 2,281,239 and Christian, 2,196,001. (It is not possible to give separate figures for Caste Hindus and non-Caste Hindus.)

The land is administratively divided into taluks of which there are 10 in Malabar and 38 in Travancore-Cochin State. The parts of South Kanara and Nilgiri Districts that form part of Kerala do not form one whole Taluk, only about half the Kasargod Taluk in South Kanara and part of Gudalur Taluk in Nilgiri District being part of Kerala.

There are 2 towns with a population of over 1 lakh, 5 with between 50,000 and 1,00,000, 8 with between 20,000 and 50,000. Most of these lie on the sea coast and 3 of these together constitute the area of the Cochin Harbour. Being one of the biggest harbours in India, this harbour and the adjoining area have got all the possibilities of becoming the nerve centre of an economically-developed Kerala. It also lies more or less in a geographically central position. It may therefore be considered to be the future capital of the National State of Kerala.

Though the economic condition of the people is miserable (the standard of living of the average Malayalee is one of the lowest in India), Kerala has big natural resources—forests, fishing, minerals, various valuable crops, etc. So also has it a skilful and industrious people many of whom, lacking profitable employment at home, go outside and earn the respect and admiration of those with whom they have come into contact. Hence, once the socio-economic barriers that today obstruct the harnessing of the labours of an industrious people to the rich resources are removed, there is every possibility of Kerala developing into an advanced industrial nation.

## Chapter II

### A PEEP INTO ANCIENT HISTORY

(1)

It is a fact accepted by historians of South India that what is today Kerala was, in pre-Aryan days, part of the Chera Empire—one of the three empires that flourished in South India in those days.

Historians have also discovered various facts which go to show that Kerala had regular trade connections with Babylonia, Phoenicia, Egypt, etc., in the second and third millenniums before Christ.

References are also found to Kerala in such works of the early Aryan period as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, etc., as well as in Emperor Asoka's inscriptions (Nos. II and XIII).

While the antiquity of Kerala is thus undisputed, it is however true that there is no reliable scientific history of ancient Kerala. While it has been proved that, as far back as 3000 B.C., teak and ivory were exported from Kerala to Babylonia, we have yet to know how these commodities were produced, what was the mode of living of the people who produced them, etc. We do not know how far the mode of production had advanced, whether field cultivation had developed, what were the instruments used in production, etc. Nor do we know the stage to which the arts had developed or the manner in which family and social relationships were regulated.

This lack of a scientific understanding of ancient Kerala society was sought to be remedied by a mythological story of the origin of Kerala. The story runs as follows: Parasurama, the mythological hero of many battles, wanted to atone for his sins and so created new land out of the ocean; the whole of this land was then given by him as a gift to the Brahmins who were settled on the land; the great hero then fixed up the rules of conduct for these newly-settled Brahmins as well as for others, making Brahmins the lords of the land, others their loyal dependants; the descendants of

these Brahmins are the present-day Namboodiris and the others are the present-day Nayars and other castes.

Needless to say that this story of the origin of Kerala was invented by the landlords, most of whom are either themselves Namboodiris or very close to them. These landlords had the advantage of being the only educated people in mediaeval Kerala. They therefore put the whole story in writing—*Kerala Mahatmyam* (Greatness of Kerala) and *Kerala Pazhama* (Antiquity of Kerala) being the two most notable works in this regard. The story thus got wide currency not only as one which passes from mouth to mouth but also as one which has the authority of the written word.

This mythological story of the origin of Kerala was later taken over by British historians, and Indian historians under British influence, in a modified form. This modified version naturally rejected the obviously absurd part of the story—the part relating to Parasurama personally having created land out of the ocean. It however said that behind the mythological story of Parasurama having created the land of Kerala lies the truth that Kerala is that part of the land which had once been submerged in the ocean and which later was thrown up by geological processes. It also said that behind the mythological story of Parasurama having given the land as a gift to Brahmins and made them the lords of the land lies the truth that Brahmins came to Kerala and settled themselves as lords of the land.

This “scientific” interpretation of the mythological story of the origin of Kerala has till very recently been accepted as “authentic history”. While it helped the spokesmen of the landlords to assert their claim to be masters of the land, it served the purpose of the new rulers of Kerala—the British—to show that all Kerala minus the pro-British landlord class is uncivilised, barbarian. The class interests of the oppressors of the people—landlords and the British—have thus in the main managed to hide the facts of history behind the obviously untenable story of the origin of Kerala.

Recently, however, a change has taken place in this: the growth of a bourgeois class, first in Tamiland and then in Kerala, has given rise to the development of “Dravidian history”. A host of researchers have unearthed facts to show that the Dravidians of South India had, long before the Aryans of North India, developed their own civilisation, built up their own Dravidian empires, developed their own Dravidian lan-

guage and literature—all independent of and distinct from the Aryan variety. This discovery of a glorious pre-Aryan civilisation of South India has finally exploded the theory of Kerala having been inhabited by uncivilised tribes who were brought into the fold of civilised society by the Aryans, since it has been conclusively shown that pre-Aryan Kerala was so civilised as to have regular trade connections with foreign countries.

Thus has arisen the new theory of Kerala—the theory of Dravidian superiority over the Aryan. It says that the people of pre-Aryan Kerala were far more civilised than the Aryans who had nothing to contribute to the indigenous civilisation of Kerala. It however does not explain why, if pre-Aryan Kerala had such a glorious civilisation, the Brahmins could so easily and successfully dominate over the land and people of Kerala.

As a matter of fact, this new theory of Dravidian superiority is as unscientific as the theory of Aryan superiority. For, it goes against all the accepted conclusions of historical research which have conclusively proved the indivisible links between social and family institutions on the one hand and the stage of civilisation on the other.

For example, the well-known American anthropologist, Lewis Henry Morgan, has conclusively shown that the matriarchal family is of a lower order than the patriarchal family. So have the Marxist historians of recent years (beginning with Engels himself) shown that the changeover from matriarchy to patriarchy takes place at a time when the hoe is replaced by the plough as the instrument of production in agriculture.

Now, it is an undisputed fact that pre-Brahmin Kerala had a predominantly matriarchal system of family relationships; nay more, that system continues to this day over the larger part of Kerala. No history of Kerala can be considered scientific unless it gives a rational explanation for this phenomenon, unless it unravels the interconnection between the matriarchal family and the state of social, political, economic and cultural life of ancient Kerala. Far from doing this, the new bourgeois theory of Dravidian superiority seeks to attribute all the characteristics of modern civilised society to a people whose family life was dominated by matriarchal relationships.

All the three classes that have so far attempted to write the history of ancient Kerala—the landlords, the British im-

perialists and the indigenous bourgeoisie—have thus failed to write real scientific history. While the former two classes have totally denied the role of the indigenous people in the pre-Brahmin Kerala, ignoring them as the active force in the development of Kerala, the latter class (bourgeoisie) denies the active role played by the Brahmins in the further development of Kerala. While the bourgeois historians have unearthed very valuable data to explode the pseudo-scientific "history" of the landlords and the British, they themselves could not help being pseudo-scientific in their historical researches. The theory of Dravidian superiority has led them to the theory of "Brahmin domination just an accident", a theory which denies the very scientific character of history.

It is the working class, and working class alone, that can develop history as a science, since it is the only class that is not interested in hiding historical facts in order that its own class interests are preserved and advanced. The working class alone can look objectively at facts, interpret their meaning without prejudices, unravel the complicated connection between several outwardly-unrelated facts and thus establish the laws of social development in history.

Unfortunately, however, the working class in Kerala is as yet so weakly developed that it has not been able to apply historical materialism to the problems of the history of ancient Kerala. What is attempted in the following pages is to pose certain problems rather than to answer them, to suggest certain hypotheses rather than to draw conclusions. It is hoped that this will stimulate discussion and that others will take up the study of these problems, so that a real and scientific history of ancient Kerala may be produced in course of time.

## (2)

Engels in his celebrated work *Origin of Family* referred to the system of group marriages that prevailed "among the Nayars in India". He said: "The men, in groups of three, four or more, have, to be sure, one wife in common; but each of them can simultaneously have a second wife in common with three or more other men, and in the same way, a third wife, a fourth and so on. This, however, is by no means real polygamy; on the contrary, it is a specialised form of group marriage, the men living in polygamy, the women in polyandry".

He added that "the certainly not uninteresting origin of this form of group marriage requires closer investigation."

Engels is inexact and inadequately informed as to the details, though entirely correct as to the main point, regarding group marriage in this part of India. For, as a matter of fact:

1) It is not among the Nayars but among some of the more backward castes that the type of group marriages which he describes prevailed in his day and prevails, to some extent, even today. (The present writer has himself come across cases of three or four brothers having one wife in common but not among the Nayars, among whom the custom has become extinct for several generations.)

2) Nayars do not have polyandrous marriages but polygamy and very easy divorces. It is only in the nineteen-twenties that polygamy has been prohibited by law and that divorce has been controlled among Nayars. Even today, however, either the man or the wife can get a divorce if he or she wants it, though it involves procedures more complicated than before.

3) This system of free marriages and divorces prevailed however not only among the Nayars but among most other Hindu castes in Kerala, the only notable exception among the Hindus to this rule being the Namboodiris who have no right of divorce.

4) Even among the Namboodiris there is a peculiar type of marital relation that cannot be rationally explained in any other way than that it is a transitional form from group marriage to the patriarchal family. The system is as follows: Only the eldest son of a Namboodiri family marries a Namboodiri girl but he takes more wives than one (three is the usual number); the younger brothers take wives from some other castes including the Nayars. Now, there is a particular stanza in *Sankara Smriti* (the authority quoted in support of all customs prevalent among the Namboodiris) which says that the birth of a son to the eldest brother will relieve the younger brothers of the sin of sonlessness, the elder brother's sons being as good as the sons of all the brothers. It is only if the eldest brother has no sons even after taking two or three wives, that the younger brother takes a wife from the caste and that in order to beget a son and relieve the family of the sin of sonlessness.

Add to these the fact that impartible joint family is the normal practice in all Hindu castes. The only difference is that while some castes have the family arranged on the basis of patriarchy, some others have it on the basis of matriarchy. Thus, while the Namboodiri has his joint family property passed on from father to son, the Nayar has it from mother to daughter. As a matter of fact, a comparison between a Namboodiri and a Nayar joint family will show that, if only a decision was made, as Engels remarked when dealing with the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal family, "that in future the descendants of the male members should remain in the gens but that those of the females were to be excluded from the gens and transferred to that of their father", the Nayar joint family becomes the Namboodiri (leaving aside, of course, the additional difference that, while all the children of the sisters in the Nayar family are members of the family, the children of only the eldest son of the Namboodiri family belong to it).

Looking at these various mystifying types of marriage and family relations from the Marxian point of view of development from group marriage to monogamy, the whole thing becomes quite clear: the polyandrous family whose traces are still to be found in certain backward castes is the more or less pure form of group marriage akin to what Engels calls the Punaluan Family; the type of marriage with polygamy and easy divorce, which is dying but not yet completely dead, among the Nayars and several other castes, is one form of transition from group to pairing marriage; while the type of marriage in which only the eldest brother marries within the caste (and he marries several wives) is another form of transition from group to pairing marriage. While the first shows as Engels says, "a certain pairing for longer or shorter periods taking place already under group marriage", and gradually "being supplanted by the pairing family", the second shows a gradual exclusion of the younger brothers from the marital rights that they had enjoyed under group marriage. It thus becomes clear that what seem to an outside observer the strange and mysterious ways of the Malayalees are nothing but the various stages of development of the earlier system of group marriage of which Engels had wisely suggested that "the certainly not uninteresting origin . . . . required investigation."

This explanation of the marriage and family system of Kerala down to modern times does of course require further in-

vestigation. For the moment, it is suggested as nothing else than a hypothesis to work upon. But, even as a hypothesis, it cannot be accepted unless we take up for discussion some basic ideas universally accepted by all acknowledged authorities on the history of Kerala. We will therefore now turn to these ideas and see how far they are correct and how they conform to the above explanation of the marriage and family system of Kerala.

## (3)

It is accepted by all the acknowledged authorities on the history of Kerala that the Malayalees of all castes except the scheduled castes are immigrants: the highest caste, the Namboodiri, is supposed to have come and colonised Kerala some time between the second century B. C. and the eighth century A.D.; the Nayar is supposed to have come earlier than the Namboodiri though in his case there are some historians who argue that they are not immigrants at all; the Ezhava is also supposed to have come some time just before or just after the beginning of the Christian Era; the Jew, the Christian, the Muslim, etc., are all of course supposed to be either immigrants themselves or converts.

These basic assumptions of the history of Kerala are so universally accepted that it is considered to be fantastic to challenge them, to suggest that these people may also have been the descendants of the earliest people of Kerala. Even the author of the latest edition of the *Travancore State Manual* who complains that "the notion of the migration of peoples has gained such great currency among ethnologists and historians that, in writing the history of a country, they proceed from a fundamental assumption that the earliest people inhabiting any part of the civilised world must have come from some other part" (Vol. II, History, p. 11), agrees that at least the Namboodiris and Ezhavas are immigrants, the former from the North and the latter from Ceylon.

These basic assumptions however cannot stand the severe test of criticism from the point of view of similarity and dissimilarity in social life. For, the organisation of "family, property and the State" of the Namboodiri in Kerala is so similar to that of the Nayar and so different from that of the North Indian Brahmin that it is difficult to accept the theory

of the Namboodiri being an immigrant. As a matter of fact, if one were to examine the problem from the point of view of the organisation of social life, one would be forced to come to the conclusion that the Nayar and the Namboodiri belong to the same racial stock, accept the same form of social organisation, the only difference being that the Namboodiri has adopted the social and cultural make-up of the Vedic age to a slightly greater degree than the Nayar.

We have already seen that the mystifying complexities of marriage and family in Kerala cannot be explained except on the assumption that there have occurred a series of transformations in the original family, leading up to the large number of forms of transition from group marriage to the patriarchal family. There are therefore very strong reasons to believe that all the castes that are today considered Caste Hindu (of which the highest is the Namboodiri and the lowest the Nayar) were once of the same caste, that there was free intermarriage among them; that they were all following a type of group marriage (nearer to what Engels calls the Punalaun Family than to any other); that certain of these castes began to impose restrictions on the freedom of marriage and to make the transition from mother-right to father-right; that the caste which imposed the maximum amount of restriction on the freedom of marriage and the sharpest break from mother-right to father-right (the Namboodiri) became the highest caste while that which retained the maximum amount of freedom in marriage and divorce and preserved mother-right intact became the lowest of the Caste Hindus or Savarna (Nayar).

The difference between the North Indian or even the Tamilian Brahmin on the one hand and the Namboodiri of Kerala on the other is so manifest that the very tradition, accepted as basically correct by historians, says that the Nayar resisted the Namboodiri so much that the latter thought it wise to adopt some of the former's customs. It is however highly improbable for a Vedic Brahmin, taught for generations to observe the strict injunctions of caste rule when getting married, to make the taking of non-caste wives as a regular practice in the case of all but the eldest son. This cannot be explained on the theory of the Namboodiri conciliating the Nayar who was resisting; nobody would demand the introduction of such queer forms of marriage as the price of peace. This can be explained only on the basis that the

previous system of Namboodiri and Nayar boys and girls marrying one another freely was changed to the system under which Nayar girls are being married to a boy belonging to any of the higher castes but not *vice versa*.

The question arises: if that is the case, how is one to explain the universally-held belief that the Namboodiri is an immigrant, coupled with the fact that he is the only man who represents, though inadequately, the culture of the Vedic Brahmin? The explanation is simple: it need not at all be disputed that small groups of Brahmins came from the North and settled themselves in Kerala; nor need it be disputed that it was they who brought the culture of the Vedic Brahmin to the people here. What is disputed and should be disputed is that the majority of, or even all, the Namboodiris are the descendants of these Brahmins from the North. The most probable development of the original Nayar (we will use this term for that caste which comprised all the castes that are today included in the Caste Hindus—Savarnas) to the present-day Namboodiri and Nayar is as follows:

1) The original Nayar was following the system of group marriage and matriarchal family. Since however the forces of production were going through such transformations as to lead to the development of trade, the family also must have been subjected to transformations though we know little about their character. It was in the midst of these transformations that Vedic culture was brought from the North.

2) The influence of the Vedic culture brought by the Brahmins from the North influenced certain sections of these original Nayars. Some of these gave up the system of group marriage, introduced strict monogamy for the woman, but continued to allow loose marriage and concubinage in the case of men who were allowed to participate in the system of group marriage where that was retained. These sections also changed over from mother-right to father-right. Furthermore, they began to study the Vedas, perform religious duties as enjoined upon in the Vedas, etc., but still retained some of their earlier practices like post-puberty marriage, keeping the tuft of hair not in the rear of the head but in front, etc. These sections of the original Nayars plus those of the North Indians who came here became the Namboodiris.

3) Certain other sections of the original Nayars were also influenced by Vedic culture but not to the same degree nor in the same manner. Some of these restricted the freedom of marriage to this extent that their girls were not allowed to marry except within the caste or a Namboodiri; they however retained mother-right. Some others went a step further and changed over from mother-right to father-right but did not take to the study of the Vedas. All these castes, numbering over a dozen, are together called Antharala Jatis, i.e., castes that stand in between the Namboodiri and the Nayar. Each of these castes does, of course, stand in a particular order in the caste hierarchy.

4) The present-day Nayar is that section of the original Nayars which made the least change in his ancient organisation of family and social life, the section which adopted Vedic culture to the least degree. But even he accepted it to the extent that he began to consider the section which made bigger changes than he did to be superior to himself.

It may be mentioned in this connection that what actually happened subsequently in the case of Christians and Muslims makes the above process look the most probable and the most logical.

For, what happened in the case of Christians was that small groups, beginning most probably with St. Thomas himself, came to Kerala, propagated their cult, converted the local people beginning with the high-caste people. In this process of conversion, however, they made such adjustments in the social life of the new converts that the Syrian Christian of Kerala is as different from his brothers of other countries as the Namboodiri Brahmin of Kerala is from his brother Brahmins of other parts of India. The Syrian Christian of Kerala is so proud of his independence from the Christians from outside that the Portuguese who tried to dominate over him in the 16th century had to face stiff resistance, as was witnessed in the memorable incident known as Koonan Kurisu Satyam (Pledge taken with the Cross of Koonan Hill). Nobody suggests that anything more than a microscopic minority of the present-day Christians are the descendants of those who came from outside.

This is the case also of the Muslims; only a very insignificant number of families came from Arabia.

If this is how Christianity and Islam penetrated our country, why should it be assumed that Brahminism could have come only along with hundreds of Brahmin families who have continued to remain the sole inheritors of Brahminism?

Equally unhistorical is the theory that Ezhavas are immigrants from Ceylon. For, it is most improbable that a section of the people numbering about 30 lakhs (the Ezhavas including their variant, Thiyyas, form nearly 25 per cent of the Malayalee Hindu population) came from outside during the last 2,000 years without leaving behind them any trace of their having come and settled here. (Ezhavas are supposed to have brought Buddhism from Ceylon. Hence they could not have come here before the beginning of the Christian Era.) And yet historians accept the theory with no other evidence than the extremely far-fetched interpretation of certain words like Ilava and Thenkai.

Here again, it need not be disputed that some people came from Ceylon and that they had very much to do with the propagation of Buddhism. What is disputed and should be disputed is that the majority of, or even all, the Ezhavas are the descendants of Buddhist immigrants from Ceylon. The manner in which the Ezhavas of today evolved themselves was very probably that, while Brahminism brought from the North by small groups was influencing certain sections of the people of Kerala, Buddhism brought from Ceylon by some other small groups was doing the same thing in the case of other sections; and that, while the sections influenced by Brahminism, became Namboodiris, Antharala Jatis and Nayars, the sections influenced by Buddhism became Ezhavas.

We therefore come to the conclusion that the so-called colonisation by Namboodiris and Ezhavas is nothing more than a figurative expression for the penetration of the Brahmin and Buddhist cultures brought by small groups of Brahmins and Buddhists and the consequent transformation of the social organisation of Kerala. But the penetration of Brahminism and Buddhism has taken place not only in Kerala but in other places also. And yet we find that while Brahminism and Buddhism dealt a crushing blow to the ancient form of social organisation in other parts of India, it is only in Kerala that remnants of the earliest form of social organi-

sation—group marriage, mother-right, etc.—continued more or less unimpaired even under Brahminism and Buddhism. It is therefore quite clear that there is something distinctive in the material conditions of Kerala which it is necessary for us to study, and without studying which we cannot come to a correct understanding of the history and social organisation of Kerala. It is precisely because bourgeois historians do not care to study these material conditions that they make such facile assumptions as explained above and raise them to the level of historical truths.

## (4)

We have referred in an earlier section of this chapter to the clash of two schools of historians—those who hold the theory of Aryan superiority and those who sing the songs of Dravidian superiority. Both have naturally applied their respective theories to Kerala which is geographically a part of South India and therefore of the Dravidian world and where Brahminism established its ascendancy for over 2,000 years.

While the clash of these two schools of historians has helped in exposing the inadequacies and fallacies of both—each pointing out the crude mistakes committed by the other—both have committed the common mistake of not taking the specific features of Kerala's material conditions as their starting-point in studying its history. If only they had done that, the school of Aryan superiority could have easily seen that the Brahmin civilisation of Kerala cannot be of the same type as that of North India; the school of Dravidian superiority would, on the other hand, have seen that the Dravidian civilisation in Kerala cannot remain the same as in other parts of South India.

The material condition of Kerala is different from that of other parts of India—North and South—in one fundamental respect: field cultivation here does not, in a normal year, require artificial irrigation by canals and other forms of public works. The two monsoons—Southwest, extending from June to September and Northeast, in October-November—together give a total rainfall of about 100 inches per year; two main crops (roughly corresponding to the Kharif

and Rabi of North India) are raised on the basis of water supplied during these two monsoons.

This distinctive feature of Kerala's material condition should be the starting point of any scientific study of Kerala's history because it forced the ancient and mediaeval inhabitant of Kerala to arrange his life in a way different from that of his brother in other parts of India—North and South. For, as Marx has remarked in his penetrating analysis of Indian and Asiatic society, "artificial irrigation by canals and public works constitutes the basis of Oriental agriculture." Nay more, it is the material basis of the very village system of Asia, a system which is so significant that Marx puts the social formation known as "Asiatic Society" side by side with the Slave, Feudal and Capitalist systems. For, says Marx,

"This prime necessity of an economical and common use of water, which, in the Occident, drove private enterprise to voluntary association, as in Flanders and Italy, necessitated in the Orient where civilisation was too low and the territorial extent too vast to call into life voluntary association, the interference of the centralising-power of the Government. Hence an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic Governments, the function of providing public works. This artificial fertilisation of the soil, dependent on a Central Government and immediately decaying with the neglect of irrigation and drainage, explains the otherwise strange fact that we now find whole territories barren and desert that were once brilliantly cultivated.... In Asiatic empires, we are quite accustomed to see agriculture deteriorating under one Government and reviving again under some other Government. There the harvests correspond to good or bad government, as they change in Europe with good or bad seasons."

It is this circumstance, adds Marx, of "the Hindoo, leaving like all Oriental peoples, to the central Government the care of the great public works, the prime condition of his agriculture and commerce", together with what he calls "the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits", that "had brought about, since the remotest times, a social system of particular features—the so-called *village system*, which gave to each of the

small unions their independent organisation and distinct life."

The exact manner in which the ancient tribal society of India—North and South—developed itself into this type of Asiatic society is yet to be investigated. There is, however, no doubt that the Vedas, the Upanishads, Mahabharatha, Ramayana, etc., are the literary expressions of this Asiatic society at the various phases of its evolution. What is popularly known as the Brahmin civilisation is nothing but the superstructure built on the basis of this Asiatic mode of production.

Similarly, what is called the Dravidian civilisation is the mode of living and thinking of the people of South India who were developing themselves from tribal to Asiatic Society, independent of their counterparts in North India. While the development of field cultivation on the basis of irrigation from the Ganges and the Jumna gave birth to Brahmin civilisation, the same development on the basis of irrigation from the Kaveri and the Godavari gave birth to Dravidian civilisation.

The development of society in Kerala cannot obviously take place on these lines, since the fundamental basis of either the Brahmin or the Dravidian civilisation is absent here. Centralised (imperial) government cannot develop here since it has no role to play in production. As a matter of fact, two efforts made to bring Kerala under such central (imperial) administration failed.

*The Chera Empire* flourished for some time in Kerala along with other parts of South India; it is probably under the Cheras that extensive commercial contacts developed between Kerala and the outside world; the very name Kerala may be a derivation from Chera. It is, however, a fact that the imperial administration of the Cheras did not leave any lasting impression on the social organisation of Kerala. It did not, for example, transform the family organisation from one that was based on mother-right to one that is based on father-right. Nor did it succeed in making the cultural tradition of the Sangam period a part of the cultural make-up of the people of Kerala, as it did succeed in making it the starting point of a glorious culture of the people of Tamilnad. The very works (in poetry) of some of the Chera rulers who had their capital in Kerala, not to speak of the works on

\*them by other poets, are today a part of Tamil and not Malayalam literature.

This failure of the Chera Empire to influence the course of the historical development of Kerala cannot be explained except on the basis that that empire was an artificial super-structure on the material conditions of Kerala. It was the advanced mode of production based on artificial irrigation from the Kaveri and other rivers that helped the growth of *Senthamil* and the development of Sangom literature; it was the increase in the wealth produced under this mode of production that dealt in Tamilnad the most crushing blow to family life based on mother-right; it was again the necessity for the organisation of such a mode of production that compelled the Tamils to develop their Chera, Chola and Pandya Empires. That material basis present in Tamilnad was absent in Kerala. The Chera Empire therefore could not last long in Kerala; it did not last long.

The second attempt made to form a centralised imperial state was the *Empire of the Perumals*, the last of whom probably reigned in the eighth century A.D. The disruption of this Empire and its division into a number of petty principalities (about 2 dozens) is the source of the great lamentation of present-day bourgeois advocates of United Kerala who claim that, down to the disruption of the Empire of the Perumals, Kerala was a united country with a united people and that it was an unfortunate accident of history that that Empire got disrupted. This theory however cannot stand the test of scientific criticism. For, eminent historians like Logan and Padmanabha Menon have shown that the Empire of the Perumals was not co-extensive with present-day Kerala but was confined at best to a territory stretching from Calicut in the North to Quilon in the South. Furthermore, the Empire itself was nothing more than a very loose combination of several petty principalities, each of whose rulers owed formal allegiance (nothing more) to the Perumal. It was precisely because there was no socio-economic basis for such an Empire to develop in the specific material conditions of Kerala, that that Empire had no alternative but total disappearance from the political scene of Kerala.

It is however true that both the Chera Empire as well as the Empire of the Perumals did indirectly play their roles in transforming the ancient tribal society into the mediaeval society of Kerala. For, the attempt to form these Empires in-

volved clashes and conflicts between the representatives and advocates of these imperial states on the one hand and the champions of the ancient tribal society on the other. Moreover, the very existence of centralised (imperial) administrations, however weak their links with the people and however short their duration, could not but have helped the development of intercourse (commercially and otherwise) between the people of Kerala and those of the outside world; this in its turn could not but have altered the very mode of production and consequently brought about big changes in the social, political and cultural life of the people of Kerala.

We have, however to take particular care when studying these changes to note that the material conditions being different, the development of production, distribution and exchange in Kerala would not lead to the same type of Asiatic Society as in other parts of India. We shall see in the next chapter that mediaeval Kerala actually developed a pattern of society which partakes of the character of both Asiatic Society as described by Marx as well as of feudal society on the model of mediaeval Europe. Before taking that up, however, we should try to get as complete a description of ancient (pre-Chera Empire) Kerala as can be unearthed, so that we can see exactly where the Chera Empire, the Empire of the Perumals, the Brahmin and Buddhist civilisations succeeded and where they failed in smashing the ancient tribal society and in constructing a new society. This alone will enable us to see what elements of ancient society still remain to be smashed in order that we may be able to build a new People's Democratic Kerala.

(5)

The traditional explanation given for the national festival of Kerala, the Onam, throws light on the pattern of social life in pre-historic Kerala. It is as follows:

"Once upon a time, the whole earth was being ruled by Emperor Mahabali. He was a good, benign emperor, extremely solicitous for the welfare of his subjects. Peace and prosperity reigned in the land. There were no quarrels among people; nor was there any inequality between one man and another. Everybody had as much

of food, clothes, houses and all other good things in life, as he or she desired.

"It was to such a good land and to its good emperor that God Vishnu came in the guise of a dwarf (Vamana). As in the case of every visitor, the Emperor asked the dwarf what he wanted. The dwarf asked for that much of land as can be measured by his three steps and it was readily granted. The dwarf however turned himself into such a huge giant that the whole earth had already been covered by the first two steps that he took. There being no other place to put his third step, the dwarf put it on the head of the emperor and sent him down to the netherworld.

"Now that it had become clear that the dwarf was not an ordinary dwarf but God Vishnu himself, the Emperor in his turn bowed low and asked for a boon which was readily granted—that he should be allowed once a year to come up to the earth and satisfy himself that his former subjects are still happy and prosperous. It was fixed that the Emperor would come on the Thiruvonam day of the Chingam month (a day that falls some time between August 15 and September 15).

"The people of the earth thereafter decided that, ten days before the Thiruvonam of Chingom, they will start making preparations to receive their beloved Emperor. On the day of the Emperor's visit and for three days thereafter, they will once again live as they had lived during the Emperor's rule. They eat the best food, put on the best clothes, entertain themselves with the most enjoyable dances, songs and games. Every member of the family who is away comes home for the annual family reunion. Nobody works on that day, even domestic servants being allowed to go home and enjoy themselves."

All this is of course nothing but a poetic way of explaining the annual harvest festival: it is exactly when the crops have already come in that the old Emperor, the origin and source of all prosperity, comes back for his annual visit. It is however significant that the few days of post-harvest prosperity at once reminds the Malayalee of the days when he had full prosperity for the whole year round—the days which have been cut short by the will of the Almighty.

It is of course difficult to find out whether there was a historical figure by the name of Mahabali. Possibly there was; for there are some places whose names are still connected with his. More probably still, this is a poetic combination of the Mahabharata story of Vamana (the fifth incarnation of Lord Vishnu) with the actual story of what happened to some tribal chieftain who was reigning at the time of the establishment of Chera sovereignty. It is to be noted in this connection that though the traditional story speaks of Emperor Mahabali, the actual celebration of the festival is connected with the deity of a temple at Trikkakkara, a few miles from Muziris or present-day Cranganore, the seat of the Chera Emperor.

But, even supposing that such a historical figure actually existed, his dethroning could not have acquired the character of such a national festival, were it not made use of to commemorate the big change in the life of the entire people—the change from primitive communal society in which the tribal chieftain has already developed into a semi-ruler of the tribe, but in which classes have not developed to any marked degree, to a society in which the rigours and sufferings of class division have already become apparent. The time and manner of this change cannot of course be ascertained on the basis of historical facts so far known, but there are facts to show that the tribal society so painstakingly investigated by Morgan and explained in its proper setting by Marx and Engels did actually exist in Kerala in pre-historic times.

There is the family of Mannanar in Chirakkal Taluk with the remains of a fort used by it. (Mannan is the Malayalam for King.) This is a family which has had some attributes of authority till a couple of generations ago but is now extinct. The present writer has not been able to collect and evaluate all the facts regarding this family but the stories told about it show unmistakably that Mannanar is one of the last remnants of the old tribal society which continued to exercise some of its old functions till 2 or 3 generations ago. It is also said that the last remains of a Pulaya Kotta (the fort of the Pulaya ruler) are still to be found in South Travancore; if this is true (the present writer has unfortunately been unable to find it out), it is another indication of the persistence of some aspects of tribal society even in the mediaeval and modern Kerala.

Far clearer, far more indisputable, is the evidence of temples and deities in all parts of Kerala. It is remarkable how, in spite of the centuries of Brahmin domination, non-Brahminical deities continue to be worshipped in the plains and coastal areas, not to speak of the same being done in the highlands. Many of these have of course been taken over by Brahmins, the deities themselves being converted to Brahminism. There are, however, many more that are still under non-Brahmin domination, being non-Brahminical in name, mode of worship, etc. Far many more are such that, though taken over by Brahmins, still show traces of their non-Brahmin origin.

Looking at these non-Brahmin temples and deities, we find that : (1) unlike in the Brahmin temples, there is very little of caste differences or none at all; (2) the temples are maintained by the daily or periodical offerings of devotees, the temples having no landed or other properties—a common attribute of Brahmin temples; (3) the offerings given to the deities are goat, fowl, toddy, etc., and not sweets and vegetable preparations as in Brahmin temples; (4) the process of worshiping the deities is far more of a collective affair of the whole body of the worshippers than in Brahmin temples where the practice is for the priest (necessarily a Brahmin) to stand between the deity and the worshippers; (5) many deities (like the Muthappan of Parassini the Ayyappan of Sabarimala, etc.) are of such a character that their origins can be traced back to some tribal chieftain who ruled in the interior or even in the forests.

The continuation of these non-Brahmin temples even to this day, the fact that some of these attract tens of thousands of pilgrims every season, shows unmistakably that the type of society whose disappearance is mourned in the traditional story of Mahabali had really existed at one time in real life and that it still continues in the people's imagination. When we add to this the fact that remnants of the marriage and family system of such a primitive communal tribal society are still observable, it becomes clear that prehistoric Kerala was a country of primitive communism.

This would immediately raise the question: How can this be squared with the theory that Kerala was a civilised land even in prehistoric times? Does this not show that, at least upto the time of the Cheras, Kerala was not civilised?

Now, the historical facts that can be said to be scientific show only two things: One, that there was regular trade between Kerala on the one hand and Babylonia, Phoenicia, etc., on the other over 2,000 years before Christ; two, that urban life and other attributes of a civilised society had developed in Kerala before the Brahmins began to dominate our social life. It does not necessarily follow from these that the people of prehistoric Kerala were so civilised as to keep regular commercial relations with the outside world or that they were leading the lives of urban citizens. It is just possible that the trade with Babylonia, Phoenicia, etc., was a one-way traffic, that it was the Babylonians, Phonecians, etc. who came here, took those products of Kerala like teak and ivory (which have been found in Babylon) and sold them in their country. If, on the other hand, the people of Kerala had themselves done this, it would most probably have left its traces in the social life of Kerala. Actually, however, we find that, in the scheme of caste evolved in Kerala under Brahmin domination, there is no caste whose profession as a caste is trade. (The merchants in pre-British Kerala are either Chettiar from Tamilnad or Jews, Christians and Muslims.) It is therefore unscientific to conclude from this evidence of ancient Kerala having had trade with the outside world, that traders should necessarily have been Malayalees.

Similarly, the fact that the Chera Emperors had their seat of power in Kerala does not necessarily show that the people of Kerala had themselves so advanced socially as to raise an empire of their own. It is just possible that the Chera Empire which grew up on the basis of the Kaveri Civilisation came and conquered Kerala, set up its capital on the West Coast (Cranganore) and carried on trade with the western world (Babylonia, Phoenicia, etc.). It would then have been an empire which has the characteristic features of what Comrade Stalin calls "the empires of the slave and mediaeval periods", i.e., empires "which had no economic basis of their own and were transient and unstable military and administrative associations. Not only did these empires not have, they could not have, a single language common to the whole empire and understood by all the members of the empire. They were conglomerations of tribes and nationalities, each of which lived its own life and had its own language." (*Marxism And Linguistics*)

We have already seen that the cultural world of the Cheras

(Tamil of the brilliant Sangam Epoch) has actually left no indelible direct impression on the culture of the Malayalees and that the Malayalam language had had to make a sharp break with Tamil before it could become an independent language. It can therefore be clearly seen that the Chera Empire and corresponding to it, the Tamil language, were not the natural product of the various tribes that inhabited Kerala but an imposition on them of a product that was natural on the banks of the Kaveri. It was most probable that, while what Comrade Stalin calls "the development from clan languages to tribal languages and from tribal languages to the language of nationalities" was taking place in Tamilnad, Kerala was undergoing nothing higher than "development from clan languages to tribal languages."

All the evidence that is available at present therefore indicates that Kerala in prehistoric times was inhabited by many tribes whose common characteristic feature is a pattern of relations of production based on primitive communism. It is of course natural for each of these tribes to have attained a particular degree of development—some of them being on the threshold of breaking away from primitive communism, some still in the lowest phase of this social formation and most of them in the various phases intermediate to these two types. But, more probably than not, none of them had already broken away from primitive communism. There is, in any case, no evidence to show that any of them had done so. It was the transformation of these various tribes into an empire of the Asiatic type that the Chera rulers attempted but failed to achieve. But the very attempt and its failure set about a chain of reactions which affected the development of social relations in Kerala, as we will see in the next chapter.

## *Chapter III*

### RISE OF FEUDALISM

(1)

The champions of the theory of Dravidian superiority claim that the Chera, Chola and Pandya Empires have a peculiar Dravidian character of their own, that they are fundamentally different from the empires of the North.

It is unnecessary for us here to try to find out if this is true in the sense that the founders of the Dravidian Empires are fundamentally different from their North-Indian counterparts from the ethnological point of view. For, the question of the racial origin of the founders of the two types of empires—the Indo-Aryan in the North, the Turanian in the South—is irrelevant in a study of the respective roles they played in the development of human society in India. Nor is it relevant here to go into the question of the antiquity of the Southern Empires, the question as to whether and by how much the Southern Empires preceded their northern counterparts. The relevant point is the sociological significance of the two types of empires, the exact role they played in transforming the ancient (tribal) society into the Asiatic Society which continued to flourish in both Northern and Southern India down to the days of British rule.

This would naturally involve a comparative study of the classical works of Sanskrit and Tamil literature—*Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, etc. on the one hand and *Silappadikaram*, *Mani Mekhalai*, etc., on the other—a study of the influence exercised by each on the other. This has, unfortunately, not been done so far by anybody on a scientific basis, the tendency being either to ignore the Tamil classics altogether (the tendency of scholars of Sanskrit literature) or to so exaggerate the role of Tamil classics as to deny the role played by the Indo-Aryan civilisation of the North in the mode of development of the Dravidian civilisation (the tendency of scholars of the Dravidian classics).

One thing however stands out very clearly: the net result of the foundation and development of the Chera, Chola and Pandya Empires in the South was the same as that of the Indo-Aryan empires in the North. We come across in the Sangam works the stories of the exploits of Dravidian emperors and heroes told in approximately the same way as in the classical works of Sanskrit literature. As matter of fact, even the most fanatical champions of the theory of Dravidian superiority do not claim that the Dravidian empires were of a fundamentally different *social* character; their claim is only this that these empires were built up independently of the Northern empires and that some of these Dravidian emperors were so powerful that they even conquered parts of North India.

Nor is this claim unfounded or unreasonable. For, just as the development of cultivation, the increase in the productivity of labour, the accumulation of wealth, etc., on the Gangetic plains led to the development of the tribal chieftains into military leaders and to the waging of wars in the North; just as this development in the North led these military leaders of the North to go as conquerors to South India and Ceylon (as is described in the Ramayana); the same development of the forces of production in the South led to the same development in the socio-political order. The process of changing the ancient (tribal) society into the new (Asiatic) society was thus more or less the same in the South as in the North.

Wars between tribes being the main instrument of breaking the old (tribal) society and building the new (Asiatic) society, it is quite natural that wars between the Northern and Southern emperors were a two-way traffic, that several emperors of the South were able, not only to beat back wars of conquest waged by their rivals from the North, but themselves to wage wars of conquest against the North.

It was through a series of such wars of conquest, defence and counter-attacks that both the Northern and Southern empires were built up; it was through them that the early Vedic civilisation became the later Brahminical and Buddhist civilisations; and it was through them that the whole Indian sub-continent and the neighbouring island of Ceylon came to have a certain amount of cultural affinity. This being so, the very Brahminical and Buddhist civilisations were the common products of the Indo-Aryans in the North and the Turanians in the South and Ceylon, though of course they had their origin

in the Gangetic plain and, parallel with it, on the Kaveri delta.

If this assessment of the respective roles of the two types of empires is correct (the very limited knowledge that the present writer possesses of the material pertaining to the question does not entitle him to state anything more than that this is a very good hypothesis to work upon and that it explains several problems of South Indian history hitherto unexplained), then we are led to the very interesting conclusion that the Dravidian empires of the South were not (as is generally supposed) bastions against Brahminism which were ultimately broken down, but the agency through which Brahminism was reared on Dravidian soil, as the Indo-Aryan empires were in North India. The great warriors and emperors, the songs of whose exploits are sung in the works of Sangom literature were, far from being defenders of the Dravidian way of life against the Aryan, the soldiers of the Aryan way of life. The dogmas of Brahminism, their practice in the daily life of its followers, were as natural to the Southern emperors of the Sangom period and to their subjects as they were to the heroes of the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, etc. The Chera, Chola and Pandya emperors were the best representatives of the ruling class in the Brahminical world of that historical epoch.

This, however, was all right only so long as the Chera Empire was confined to that part of South India which lies to the east of the Western Ghats. As soon as it went down west of the Ghats into the plains of Malabar (present-day Kerala and South Kanara), the Empire encountered unexpected difficulties. For, the very condition precedent for the development of such an empire—development of productivity in cultivation based on artificial irrigation constructed on a big scale—was absent here. However powerful the rulers sitting in their capitals, however extensive the commercial contacts that they had with the outside world (Babylonia, Phoenicia, etc.), however glorious the arts and literature produced under their patronage, they could not penetrate beyond the outer surface of social life in Kerala. Hence, while the Dravidian people beyond the Ghats adapted themselves to—nay, even helped in the creation of—the Brahminical way of life in all its essentials, their brethren to this side of the Ghats continued to live their old life in several essentials (as we have already seen in the previous chapter). \*

It is however wrong to think that the laws of social development operating outside Kerala had no validity here. As a matter of fact, field cultivation had already developed in Kerala by the time of the Mahabharatha, as is clear from the statement that the belligerents in the battle of Kurukshetra were being supplied, among others, with rice by the King of Kerala. Such a development of the productive forces necessarily led to accumulation of wealth, division of labour, division of society into classes, etc. It paved the way for the break-up of the family system based on mother-right in the case of those classes and tribes which had already started on the path of accumulation of wealth, division of labour, division of society into classes, etc. It moreover led these advanced classes and tribes into contact with the advanced mode of production and living which had already developed outside Kerala. It was through these developments that the soil of Kerala was prepared for the sowing of the seed of Brahminism and its development into the mediaeval social order. But, as the essential material prerequisite for the Brahminical system of society—artificial irrigation organised by a centralised state—was absent here, that mediaeval social order had to take a path different from that of the Gangetic plain as well as of the Kaveri delta.

This explains the peculiar fact that, while Kerala has adopted the Brahminical scheme of division of labour—the system of division of society into high and low castes—and developed it into the worst form of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability, she has at the same time clung to a most un-Brahminical form of social life in several respects. Division of society into castes is as natural a development for Kerala as for Tamilnad and North India, since that is the mechanism through which accumulation of wealth could advance further than it did in the first stages. The particular use made of this division of society into castes, its development into a centralised State, was however inapplicable in Kerala. The break-up of the old (tribal) society had therefore to take a path different from the one taken by the tribes and nationalities outside Kerala.

The exact manner in which she traversed this path will be described in the succeeding pages but let us state very clearly, here and now, that the essence of this path of Kerala is the existence of landed property of feudalism, the absence of which has been noted by Marxists as the principal feature

of Oriental Society. ("How comes it that the *Orientals did not reach to landed property or feudalism?* I think the reason lies principally in the climate, combined with the conditions of the soil, especially the great desert stretches which reach from the Sahara right through Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary to the highest Asiatic uplands. Artificial irrigation is here the first condition of cultivation, and this is the concern either of the communes, the provinces or the central governments." Engels, Letter to Marx, June 6, 1853. Emphasis mine.) In other words, while it was the task of the British in India as a whole to establish "private property in land—the great desideratum of Asiatic Society", this "great desideratum" had actually developed in Kerala in mediaeval days.

Though the basis of society in Kerala was thus more akin to that of Europe where feudalism developed in the mediaeval age, the superstructure built on that basis was Brahminical, i.e. Asiatic. This contradiction between the basis and the superstructure explains why Kerala could not develop either the feudalism of the European type or the Asiatic Society on the lines of that of the Gangetic plain or of the Kaveri; why she could neither preserve the old primitive communal society intact nor adopt the Brahminical social order in all its main essentials; why the present-day socio-economic order of Kerala offers rich material for the study of almost every pattern of society from primitive communal to capitalist.

Only an understanding of this contradiction between the basis and the superstructure—an understanding of the fact that while the basis (i. e., "the economic structure of society at the given stage of its development"—Stalin) was taking the path of its development towards feudalism, the superstructure (i. e., "the political, legal, religious, artistic, philosophical views of society and the political, legal and other institutions corresponding to them".—Stalin) was taking the path of development towards Asiatic society—will enable us adequately and systematically to explain the various phases in the development of society in Kerala. For, as Stalin says, "the superstructure is a product of the basis, but this does not mean that it merely reflects the basis, that it is passive, neutral, indifferent to the fate of its basis, to the fate of the classes, to the character of the system. On the contrary, having come into being, it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its basis to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing every-

thing it can to help new system finish off and eliminate the old basis and the old classes." (*On Linguistics*)

That the champions of the two theories of South Indian history, especially those of Kerala history, have no such understanding of the relation between the basis and the superstructure is at the root of their failure to explain the main facts of history. They do not understand that, so far as the basis is concerned, South India is not a homogeneous entity but is split up into two—one part having the same basis as in North India while the other has a different basis. Nor do they understand that, having the same basis, one part of South India (Tamilnad and Andhra) built up its superstructure on the same lines as, though independently of, that of North India. Still less do they understand that that part of South India which has a different basis (Kerala) built up its own superstructure different from that of the rest of India. Finally, they do not understand that it was the vain attempt of the ruling classes of Kerala to artificially build up a superstructure on a basis that cannot naturally give birth to it that has created a superstructure that looks absurd to a superficial observer but which served the purpose of the further development of productive forces—a superstructure which is partly primitive communist, partly Asiatic, partly feudal, but which at the same time so developed the productive forces that the rising bourgeoisie of Europe started its career of trading with and conquering India on the coasts of Kerala.

## (2)

When the British administrators took upon themselves the task of land settlement, they found that the prevailing system of land-ownership in Kerala was different from that of the major part of India. As against the system of the Government getting, as the supreme owner of all lands in the country, a more or less well defined fraction of the value of agricultural produce as in other parts of India, the Government in Kerala had no right of any kind on the land, not even the right to receive annual land revenue. It was during the administration of the Nawabs of Mysore (Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan) that land revenue was first levied in Malabar. Even in Travancore and Cochin where, by the time the British became the overlords of the State, the Government had become

the owner of large tracts of land (the process of their acquiring these ownership rights will be described in a subsequent chapter), there were other large tracts of land which were owned by private jenmis (landlords) who were free from the obligation to pay any land revenue to the State. This fact and several others made the British rulers see that the ownership rights of the Government were the least, while those of private jenmis were the most, in Kerala.

They however did not go beyond noting this fact. The explanation for it they more or less took over from the traditional account of the origin of Kerala, though after rejecting the crudest part of it. That traditional account, as we have seen earlier, is that the mythological hero, Parasurama, created Kerala out of the ocean and then made a free gift of it to the Brahmins (Namboodiris). Being the representatives of the modern bourgeois class, the British administrators could not of course accept this version in its mythological form. They, however, accepted it in all essentials, i.e., that the system of land relations in Kerala which has the maximum degree of proprietary rights in land was the creation of a small minority of immigrants; that these immigrants were themselves in their original homelands following a system of land relations in which communal ownership was dominant; that, just by saying "let there be proprietary rights on land", they created proprietary rights which were, without resistance, accepted by the indigenous people. They did not stop to consider how it was possible for a whole system of class relations to be established by a small minority of immigrants unless the local soil had already been prepared for it.

As far as we are concerned, we have already questioned the very basic assumption that the Namboodiris of Kerala are immigrants from outside. We have offered the hypothesis that, barring a small minority of settlers, the majority of the Namboodiris and other castes are people who were the original inhabitants of Kerala and that the difference between one caste and another is a difference in the stage reached by them in the evolution of society. But even supposing that that hypothesis is disproved, it does not follow that the theory of the Namboodiris being the first proprietors of land is correct.

There is, on the other hand, very strong reason to believe that land had already gone very far towards being turned into private property before the Namboodiris had come and settled.

themselves in Kerala. For, it is an undisputed fact that the system of landownership in the regions from which Namboodiris are supposed to have come to Kerala is communal ownership by the village communities. It is therefore natural that they should try to introduce not the system of private proprietorship but the system of communal proprietorship of land. Actually, however, the system that was created after they came and settled themselves in Kerala is the furthest removed from communal ownership.

This riddle cannot be unravelled except on the assumption that private proprietorship had already developed here by the time the Namboodiris started immigrating and that what they did was just to transfer the rights of ownership from the original inhabitants to themselves. This assumption is also highly untenable because, if the rights of ownership had developed to such a high degree among the original inhabitants, the transfer of ownership from them to the immigrants would have caused bloody conflicts: the immigrants should have been the possessors of such overwhelming amount of physical force as to crush all resistance. As a matter of fact, all available evidence shows that it was the original inhabitants (the Nayars) who were far more powerful from the point of view of physical force than the immigrants. There is no reason why a people who had independently developed a higher form of property relations—private property as opposed to communal—and who, besides, possessed greater physical force should submit themselves socially (consider themselves an inferior caste) and economically (transfer their rights of proprietorship) to a people who were on a lower level of economic development and who were physically weaker than themselves.

The only rational explanation of the development of property is therefore the same as we made in the case of the development of the family: that it was the operation of internal forces within Kerala and not any intervention from outside, that led to the development of a system that is unique in a country that is developing along the lines of an Asiatic Society. Since, moreover, we have already laid our finger on the basic ingredient of the internal forces within Kerala—the absence of the system of artificial irrigation and therefore of centralised administration—it is easy for us to trace in broad outline how these internal forces worked and ultimately created the system of private property.

1) At the time of or even before the Chera Empire, field cultivation had developed to such an extent that the destruction of the equality that is characteristic of primitive communal society and which is commemorated in the traditional account of Emperor Mahabali had begun; class division had started making its appearance.

2) Class division however took the form of caste division: those who were in a position to accumulate the greatest amount of wealth came to occupy the position of being the highest caste; the next in point of the accumulation of wealth became the next highest caste, and so on, till we reach the class that is in a position to accumulate no wealth at all which became the lowest caste.

3) This process of the division of society into castes was facilitated or even stimulated by the Chera Empire and other contacts with the rest of India. Whether these contacts did also include the physical immigration of a whole caste (Namboodiris) or whether only a few immigrants came is still an open question, though, as we have noted earlier, it is most likely that only a few came, mixed themselves with those indigenous people who had accumulated the greatest amount of wealth and, together with them, formed the highest caste, the Namboodiris.

4) This division of society into castes disrupted the old tribal society. Not only did it lead to inequality in social relations, but it also broke up the old tribal assemblies. In place of an assembly for each tribe came an assembly for each caste. Thus developed the Gramams of the Namboodiri, the Tharakoottams of the Nayar and other caste assemblies—each caste having its own, more or less democratically functioning assembly.

5) The further development of cultivation, as well as trade in certain commodities (particularly forest produce), led to still greater accumulation of wealth which, in its turn, led to a slow but sure process by which the powers of these caste assemblies themselves got restricted. It was through this process that the military-feudal regime of mediaeval Kerala was evolved, as we will see in the following pages.

6) The economic consequence of this break-up of the ancient tribal assemblies was that the wealth that was accumulated also underwent this transformation. Each caste assembly (Gramam, Tharakoottam, etc.) had its own temple, the deity of which constituted the reflection and representa-

tive of the collective body of the entire caste. And it was in the name of the temple and its deity that the wealth accumulated through generations was held. Gradually, however, the control of the temple and therefore of its property narrowed down, first from the entire caste assembly to the collective body of the heads of families, then from the heads of all families to those of a few families and, in the end, to the head of one family. When it had reached this stage, it remained only to transform the right of ownership, from that of the head of that family as trustee of the temple and through it of the entire caste, to that of the head of that family in its own right. Any number of such transformations have taken place in living memory (many of them to the personal knowledge of the present writer himself)—transformation of public *Devaswam* (literally, the property of God) to private *Devaswam* and of *Devaswam* to *Brahmaswam* (literally, the property of the Brahmin). Furthermore, a very large extent of land remains, to this day, after so many centuries in which temple properties were subjected to such transformations, the property of the temples.

7) While the above was the basic form in which the ancient communal property was destroyed and private property established, the process of the establishment of the militarist-feudal regime of mediaeval Kerala led to other forms—invasion and conquest by one chieftain of another's land leading to the confiscation of the latter's private property by the former; the presentation of gifts by chieftains to their dependants; the offering of property to Brahmins by devout non-Brahmins, etc. The development of money, the exchange of commodities, etc., also led to the mortgaging and sale of land. (The collection of documents made by Mr. Logan, the most authoritative British historian of Kerala, contains several documents showing that purchase and sale of land was very common in mediaeval Kerala, long before the British came and settled themselves here.) It was through a combination of all these forms that the system of private property in land developed in Kerala. None of these forms however could have made its appearance unless the collective property of ancient tribal society had already been destroyed in the manner described above.

It can therefore be stated that the traditional account of the origin of the system of land relations in Kerala—that land was given as a free gift to the Namboodiris—is correct only to

this extent that the evolution of the caste system (in which, of course, the Namboodiri occupies the highest position) is intimately connected with the evolution of private property in land. As a matter of fact, it is this adaptation of the Brahminical caste system of the Gangetic plain to the soil of Kerala, in order to evolve a system of land relations akin to those of mediaeval Europe, that lies at the root of all those peculiarities of the social order in Kerala which are bewildering to a visitor from outside. The examination of the question of how this adaptation took place leads us direct to the question of the evolution of the State in Kerala—the break-up of the ancient tribal assemblies, the attempts at setting up a centralised State of the type found in Asiatic Society, the failure of these attempts, leading ultimately to the formation of the militaristic-feudal State apparatus but with no centralised empire, etc —which we will now take up.

## (3)

The Zamorin of Calicut and the Raja of Cochin, in their long-drawn-out wars to decide the issue as to which one of them was to become the Emperor of Kerala, both claimed descent from Cheraman, the last of the Perumals, and as such, the throne of the Emperor of Kerala.

The ruling dynasty of Travancore for its part claimed direct descent from the Cheras who ruled Kerala as its emperors long before the Perumals established themselves in Kerala. This dynasty further claims that it was not subjected to the overlordship of the Perumals but was an independent ruling dynasty equal to the Perumals. It claimed therefore that it had a title to the emperorship of Kerala far more ancient and continuous than that of any descendant of the Perumals.

These claims and counterclaims of the various ruling dynasties have become so great a part of the consciousness of the historians that most of them take it for granted that Kerala had been a centralised imperial state down to the 9th century A.D. when the Empire of the Perumals got broken up into more than a dozen petty kingdoms. This common consciousness of the historians has been taken by the bourgeois champions of the Aikya Kerala (United Kerala) movement as their ideological basis; they mourn the "fact" that the once united and glorious Kerala fell into evil days in which each

ruling dynasty quarrelled with the other and brought ruin and slavery on the people.

This view of Kerala having had in the past a united centralised imperial State is of course wrong. We have seen that what made centralisation possible and necessary in other parts of India — the need to organise artificial irrigation — was absent in Kerala and that it was the absence of this factor that led to the downfall of both the Chera Empire and the Empire of the Perumals. It is therefore most unscientific on anybody's part to accept uncritically the so-called "historical fact" that Kerala had once been a centralised imperial State.

It would however be wrong to dismiss the Chera Empire and the Empire of the Perumals as two phenomena which have had no influence on the course of the development of society. Close examination of the available evidence shows, on the other hand, that the social order underwent basic changes during the two imperial regimes, so that, even though the empire was a "transient and unstable military and administrative association", as Comrade Stalin describes all the empires of the slave and mediaeval age, society did not remain, after its dissolution, in the same stage as it had been before its formation.

There is of course no reliable evidence to show what type of society existed before the formation of the Chera Empire. We can only presume that more or less the same order that is described in the traditional epoch of Mahabali prevailed at the time — a social order in which classes have not developed, tribal equality continued to prevail, but tribal chieftains had started assuming far greater authority than they did in the earlier phases of Primitive Communism. It may be further assumed that the Cheras were a people who had already developed class society (of the Asiatic type) and that it was under their imperial rule that Brahminism became a vital social force in Kerala. For, as we have already seen, the Chera and other South Indian empires were of the same socio-economic character as the North Indian empires and hence took to the Brahminical ideology very easily and as a natural course. In any case we know that, by the time the Namboodiris established their social ascendancy — it is irrelevant here whether they were in their entirety an immigrant people or whether the majority of them were thrown up from the indigenous people — society had already developed on the lines of a caste oligarchy which is described in tradition as follows :

"The land of Parasurama was very early divided into four districts, namely the Tulu Khandam from Gokarnam to Perumpula River, the Kupa Khandam from the Perumpula to the Kotta River, the Kerala Khandam from Putthupattanam to Kannetti including the southern half of the Kurumbranad Taluq of Malabar, Cochin and North Travancore, and the Mushika Khandam extending from Kannetti to Cape Comorin.

"The country was parcelled out into 64 villages — 32 in Tulu Khandam and the other 32 south of it—and granted to the Brahman colonists with 'flower and water' to be enjoyed as a freehold for ever. A hundred and eight *Kalaries* were established to train the men in arms. Images of *Durga* and *Sasta* were installed in different places, the former on the sea coast and the latter on the hills. Rules were laid down to regulate the religious ceremonies. The ordinances of Parasurama were obeyed by all, and even the wind and the weather and the other forces of nature respected his commands and performed their allotted functions to ensure the prosperity of Kerala and the welfare of its inhabitants. The Namboodiris thus became the lords of the land in virtue of Parasurama's grant.

"The form of government prescribed by Parasurama was a sort of oligarchy in which all the 64 *gramans* were represented. For some time, the system appears to have worked well enough. On the failure of the *gramakkars* to meet together and conduct the affairs of the country satisfactorily as ordained by the Rishi, representative authority was conferred on 4 villages, Payyannur, Perumchellur, Parappur and Chengannur, to act on behalf of the whole community. While the Brahmins were ruling the land, disputes arose which marred the happiness of the people. Rakshapurushas or Protectors were therefore appointed and commissioned to hold office for 3 years. 4 *Kalakams* or advisory bodies were established, each under an official called *Thaliyathiri*, to assist the Rakshapurushas in administering the affairs. Four caste assemblies, *Varna Kalakams*, were formed to protect the different interests. It was also resolved that each of the *Kalakams* should have a house at Thiruvanchikkulam which was the seat of government so that the representatives should be able to guide and control the administration. Some of the Brahm-

- min families were initiated in arms to ensure efficient fighting and good leadership." (*Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, pp. 4-5)

The *gramams* mentioned in this traditional account continue to this day as relires of this social organisation. They of course do not perform any social function today. But most families are even today known as belonging to this or that *gramam* and some of them have a say in the management of the affairs of the *Gramakshetram* (the common temple of the *gramam*). It can therefore be safely concluded that the traditional account given above is correct to this extent that the Namboodiris were organised into 64 *gramams*.

It however does not appear to be correct in so far as it says that these *gramams* of the Namboodiris had political and administrative authority over the entire people of a particular territory, over people of all castes. For, side by side with these *gramams* of Namboodiris, there continued to flourish also the Tharakkoottams of the Nayar and the associations of the other castes.

It would therefore be better and more correct to assume, as we did earlier, that the socio-political organisation described in the traditional account given above shows that the ancient tribal society had broken up to give rise to the caste society, that the primitive communal tribal republic had given place to a series of caste republics, that these caste republics in their turn had started developing towards the autocratic authority of the caste leaders.

Herein is to be found the germ of the State, the mechanism that is yet to be developed and perfected as an organ of crushing the resistance of the lower classes (castes) to the authority of the upper classes (castes). It is not yet an organ standing above society since it is yet a part of the social organisation of each caste; but the process has already started since (i) each caste assembly has started to surrender part of its authority to caste leaders and (ii) the caste assemblies of the higher castes had started to encroach on the authority of the assemblies of the lower castes.

It was to facilitate this process and to bring it to its culmination in the establishment of a regular State machine that the Empire of the Perumals came to be established. The above-mentioned traditional account goes on to say :

"This system (the rule by the *gramams* of the Namboodiris) having failed of its purpose, the Brahmins, in a meeting assembled at Thirunavai, resolved to bring down a king to govern the country. The choice fell on Keya Perumal of Keyapuram in the country beyond the Ghats. The Kali year of his installation, 3317, is expressed in the chronogram *Bhiman Thupoyam prapya*, corresponding to A.D. 216. The newly-appointed Perumal was put on terms. He had to enter into a covenant with the people that he would respect the ancient customs and usages and permit them to conduct the administration themselves. Ordinarily twelve years was to be the period of the rule of each Perumal. On its termination he was to retire from public life. The most approved mode of doing this, it is said, consisted in the Perumal cutting his own throat, on the termination of a grand feast, in the presence of the assembled guests. These Governors were bound to observe certain Brahminical regulations. In matters of doubt the decisions of the Brahmins was to be final. There were 25 Perumals in all who ruled the country from A. D. 216 to A. D. 428. The field of selection was wide and the Perumals are said to have represented that dynasty in South India which was most powerful for the time being, for we hear of Chera Perumals, Chola Perumals, and Pandy Perumals. The last Perumal was permitted to govern for 36 years at the end of which he is said to have embraced Islam and embarked for Mecca after partitioning his territories among his numerous kinsmen who thus became the rulers of the land." (*Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, pp. 5-6)

This traditional account of the Perumals is wrong in several respects: it is not true, for example, that the last of the Perumals embraced Islam and went to Mecca. The late Padmanabha Menon whose monumental work, *The History Of Kerala*, is the best-known authoritative work on the subject, says that this story is the result of the mixing up of two historical facts — the conversion to Buddhism of one of the earlier Perumals and the conversion of one of the subsequent Zamorins to Islam — and that the last of the Perumals was converted to neither but died a natural death as a devout Hindu.

Equally wrong is the assumption, underlying the tradi-

tional account, that the Perumals were the sovereign rulers of the whole of Kerala. For, after making a thorough study of three copper-plate grants made by some of these Perumals, the late Padmanabha Menon comes to the conclusion that during the period ranging from the end of the seventh to the beginning of the ninth century A. D., the boundary of Kerala stretched only from Calicut to Quilon and not to the whole Malayalam-speaking area of today. He also points out that though the Perumals were accepted as emperors, some very powerful rulers were already reigning in this period, some of whom have signed as witnesses to the grants made in the copper-plate documents.

A third interesting conclusion emerges out of the study of the above-mentioned copper-plate grants — that the Perumals were not the heads of a State based on the Brahminical caste organisation but rulers of a territorial administrative machinery covering all castes and religions. For, the three copper-plate documents are those which confer certain privileges and lands on some non-Hindu (Jewish and Christian) communities. Attested as these grants are by some of the best-known rulers of Kerala in that period, including the emperors themselves, they make it perfectly clear that the transition from caste oligarchy to the territorial administrative machine had already taken place before the last of the Perumals passed away.

As a matter of fact, it would appear, it was this very thing that the Perumals were expected to do: class differentiation had grown to such an extent that it was time for the caste assemblies, including the *gramams* of the highest caste, to be deprived of their administrative functions. These latter had to be entrusted to a special mechanism which should, of course, be linked up socially with the caste hierarchy but should be politically independent of it. It was in search of such a mechanism that the Namboodiris assembled at Thirunavai went to the land beyond the Ghats — the nearest land where such a mechanism had functioned for centuries. That mechanism failed in the form in which it functioned in its original home —in the form of a centralised imperial State—since the economic basis of that form, Asiatic Society, was not and could not be laid in Kerala.

But, in the process of laying the foundations for such a centralised imperial state, the ruling class that was emerging in Kerala found the State form that was particularly suited to

the soil of Kerala — a militarist-feudal State, rooted in private property in land, closely linked with the caste system of Hinduism (complemented of course with elements of the Jewish, the Christian and the Muslim religions) and extending to such narrow boundaries as are capable of being administered under conditions of ill-developed communications. It was the necessity for such a conglomeration of petty principalities, the unsuitability of the centralised imperial type of State in the material conditions of Kerala, that led to the break-up of the Empire of the Perumals.

The State form that emerged out of these transformations is described as follows by the author of the *Cochin State Manual*:

"The government was based more or less on principles resembling those of the feudal system of Europe in the middle ages. The king was the supreme ruler of the country, but local administration was in the hands of hereditary chiefs subordinate to him. The kingdom was divided into a number of *nads* or districts of varying extent, each presided over by a hereditary chief called *Naduvazhi*, and each *nad* was for military and other purposes divided into *desams*, some of which were presided over by hereditary *Desavazhis*, while the others, being the private property of the *Naduvazhi* or the king, were administered by the latter directly or by officers appointed by them. The *desam* was further subdivided not into territorial units but into caste or tribal groups such as the *gramam* of the Namboodiris, the *tara* of the Nayars, the *cheri* of the low castes, the territorial limits of which, though more or less well defined, overlapped each other. The *nad* and *desam* of this coast differed from analogous territorial divisions elsewhere in that they consisted not of so many towns and villages, but of so many Nayars, such as the "Five Hundred" of Kodakaranad, the "Four Hundred" of Annemanad and the "Three Hundred" of Chengazhinad. The affairs of the caste or tribal groups were under the management of headmen or elders, Graminis, Karanavans, Tandans, etc., as the case might be. The Karanavans looked after the local affairs of the *tara*, superintended the cultivation of the desmenes of their chief, who might be a king, a *Naduvazhi*, a *Desavazhi* or a mere *janmi*, received a share of the produce for their maintenance, and render-

ed military services to him, whenever called upon to do so. The *Desavazhis*, where they existed, had the direction of all the affairs of the *desam*, and saw to the execution of all the orders sent to them by the king or the *Naduvazhi*. They were also military leaders, subject to the authority of the *Naduvazhis* and marched at the head of their quotas when ordered to the field. The *Naduvazhis* had authority in their respective *nads* in all civil and military matters, but the extent of that authority and the degree of their subordination to the king depended upon their political status. All of them however were bound to maintain a number of men at arms, fixed according to their position and wealth, and to attend the king in his wars.

#### *"The Naduvazhis"*

"The *Naduvazhi* chiefs, by whatever designation they were styled, whether Raja or Acchan or Kaimal or merely Nayar, belonged to one of the three classes, viz., *Svarupi*, *Prabhu* and *Madambi*. All who had the power of life and death were *Svarupis*. A *Svarupi* might therefore be an independent king like that of Cochin or Calicut, or he might be a tributary Raja like that of Porakad or Alangad, the only restriction on whose power was that they could not make war or coin money without the sanction of their suzerain, or he might be a subordinate chief like the Kaimal of Koratti or the Nambiar of Muriyanad, governing a district under the orders of the king. The *Prabhu* differed from the third class of *Svarupis* only in that he had no power of life and death. He might be wealthier and more powerful than a *Svarupi*, but he could not exercise the power of life and death unless he was raised to the rank of a *Svarupi*. The *Madambis* were petty chiefs with very limited powers, who had only very small bodies of armed retainers under them, seldom exceeding a hundred in number. All had to pay the king a succession fee or *purushandaram*, varying from two to 1,200 fanams, a small annual tribute called *andukazhcha*, and an annual contribution for special protection variously called *rakshabhogam*, *changatam*, *palam*, etc. The *Madambis* had to pay, besides these, the assessment called *Kettutengu*, which was a cess levied only on three per cent of the coconut trees in a garden. No regular land tax was levied from the *Svarupis* and *Prabhus*, but they were called upon for special contributions on extraordinary occasions. The

merits and defects of government through the agency of hereditary nobles who were also commanders of armies are self-evident. The conflicting interests of the chiefs and their mutual jealousies and misunderstandings led to endless quarrels and faction fights, and the country was generally in a state of political effervescence. The same circumstances also made it the interest of the chiefs to protect their people and promote their prosperity, and that prosperity was not seriously interfered with by the wars and fights of those days, as the latter were governed by certain humanitarian rules and regulations which were scrupulously observed by all parties." (pp. 48-49)

*"The Power of the King"*

"Though the king exercised great authority over his subjects and chiefs, his power was not unlimited. In the first place, the personal equation was an important factor in the politics of old Cochin. If the king happened to be a weak man, his authority was hardly more than nominal, especially in the territories directly under the control of his chiefs. If he was a strong man and a capable ruler, he managed to exercise great power, but even the power of such a king was not absolute. The kuttam of the nad, or the national assembly, effectively curbed the power of the king and would not tolerate any violation by him of the laws and usages of the country. 'When a new king is crowned' says Duarte Barbosa, 'all the grandees and former governors make him swear to maintain all the laws of the late king, and to pay the debts which he owed, and to labour to recover that which other former kings had lost. And he takes this oath, holding a drawn sword in his left hand, and his right hand placed upon a chain lit up with many oil wicks, in the midst of which is a gold ring, which he touches with his fingers and then he swears to maintain everything with that sword. When he has taken the oath, they sprinkle rice over his head, with many ceremonies of prayer and adoration to the sun, and immediately after, certain counts, whom they call Caymal, along with all the others of the royal lineage, and the grandees, swear to him in the same manner to serve him, and to be loyal and true to him'. The chiefs and the people thus obeyed the king ungrudgingly so long as he remained within the limits of the law. Even if a king or

chief were to worry some individuals, the whole community would not rise against him, but if any orders issued were prejudicial to the interests of the community, the people would not submit to them. Hendrik Adrian Van Rheede, the Dutch Governor of Cochin from 1673 to 1677 and the celebrated author of *Hortus Malabaricus* says: 'Subjects are not bound to observe any orders, commands or whims and council decisions of the king which are at variance with their laws, prosperity or privileges, and which they have approved of in their own territories and accepted at their political meetings. No king of Malabar has the power to make contracts which are prejudicial to the interests of landlords, noblemen, or Nayars; such a king would run the risk of being expelled or rejected by his subjects....' The English East India Company's Linguist at Calicut, reporting on certain commotions there, said: 'These Nayars being heads of Calicut people, resemble the Parliament, and do not obey the king's dictates in all things, but chastise his ministers when they do unwarrantable acts.' According to Keralolpatti, Parasurama separated the Nayars into taras and assigned to them the functions of 'the eye', 'the hand' and 'the order' (the power to supervise, to execute and to give orders), 'with a view to prevent the rights (of all classes) from being curtailed or suffered to fall into disuse.' " (pp. 50-51)

The foregoing pages make it clear that the development of the basis (an economic order based on private property in land) as well as the political superstructure (the militarist-feudal state machine) were the natural development of ancient tribal society in Kerala and that the historical role played by the ruling classes of Kerala lay precisely in laying this economic basis and building this political superstructure.

The same however cannot be said of the ideology that came to dominate the ruling classes and through them society as a whole. For, Kerala being only a small part of India and its mode of production being of such a type as to lead to less productivity of labour, the ruling classes, even when they evolved out of the soil of Kerala, could not develop an ideology of their own; what they did was to take over other ideologies and make them their own. When it was a question of laying the economic basis and building the political superstructure, even such of the ruling classes as came from outside (Namboodiris

or Perumals for example) could not help departing from what they had learned in their original homelands and creating something new; on the other hand, when it was a question of building the ideological superstructure — religion, literature, arts, etc. — even such of the ruling classes as grew on local soil had perforce to take over something that had already been created outside.

This conflict between the basis and political superstructure on the one hand and the ideological superstructure on the other should have led to conflicts between the various sections of the ruling classes; it also led to conflicts between the rulers and the ruled as a whole. There is very little historical evidence indicating how these class conflicts took place. There is however no doubt that such conflicts have taken place, as is indicated by the traditional account of the colonisation of Kerala by the Namboodiris—that, when they came here, they had to meet the furious resistance on the part of the Nagas (Nayars) and that it was only when the Namboodiris agreed to follow the customs and manners of Kerala, including serpent-worship, that the Nagas (Nayars) were pacified.

The rapidity and ease with which successive religions established their firm grip over the masses—first Brahminism, then Buddhism, also Judaism, later Christianity and later still Islam; the obstinacy with which the indigenous religious beliefs and practices continued among the masses after centuries of these various religions; the pressure felt by each of these religious communities to depart from what they had adhered to in their original homelands and to adapt themselves to the conditions of their new land—all these show two things:

One, the great social transformation accomplished in the course of the centuries from the beginning of the Chera Empire to the end of the Empire of the Perumals was so great that the ideology of ancient tribal society was totally inadequate. The ground was thus prepared for any and all sorts of new ideologies that were going about anywhere in the world; any new religion (which, after all, was in that age the central element of the ideological system) would immediately grip the mass mind; it would grip the minds of even sections of the ruling classes as is manifest in the conversion of one of the Perumals to Buddhism, the conversion of a large num-

ber of Namboodiris to Christianity by St. Thomas himself and the conversion of some upper class Hindu families to Islam.

Two, every one of these ideological systems was so alien to the soil of Kerala that the masses were not prepared to accept it in its entirety or in its original form; the leaders of each of these religions were forced to make several departures from their original beliefs and practices. There is something particularly Malayali about the beliefs and practices of the Namboodiri, the Syrian Christian and the Moplah, though they claim to be true followers of Brahminism, Christianity and Islam respectively.

It would be wrong to consider these changes in the religious system as having been brought about smoothly; big clashes and conflicts must have taken place though we know very little about them. It is only in respect of one of these conflicts, that between Brahminism and Buddhism that there is some, though meagre, evidence. It was this conflict that threw up Sankara, the philosopher, who dealt the final blow to Buddhism on the soil of Kerala. Nor was it a mere ideological conflict confining itself to abstruse questions of the soul, it was a bitter, practical, daily struggle between two camps in which, as in all wars, everything that leads to victory was considered fair and just. The result was that Buddhism ceased to exist in Kerala, though at one time it was a very powerful force.

Since the ruling classes had to fight these battles of ideas, they had perforce to develop a distinct category of ideologues who made it their whole-time occupation to study one or another department of ideology, sharpen their own understanding of the subject, carry on polemics against opponents, etc. It was thus that a great volume of literary works—artistic, philosophical, scientific—was created. Sankara and his philosophical works are of course the best-known of these literary productions of the ideological representatives of the ruling classes of Kerala; but there are many more that are less well-known outside but show the high degree of the cultural level of our ideologues. They include original, creative artistic works (*kavyas*) as well as scientific works in the various fields of knowledge.

But all this cultural work, an attempt to build an ideological superstructure in Kerala of a type natural to the Gangetic Plain and the Kaveri Delta, was artificial to its soil. It was the social order based on hundreds of village communities

ties ruled by a powerful centralised imperial State that gave birth to the ideology which the rulers of Kerala attempted to transplant to the soil of Kerala; while the social order of Kerala was one in which the ancient tribal republics were being replaced not by the village communities and the centralised imperial State but first by the caste assemblies and then by the system of militarist-feudal petty principalities.

This contradiction between the social order that was developing as a natural course and the ideological system that was being artificially attempted to be planted here lay at the root of the extreme isolation of the arts, literature, sciences, philosophy, etc. from the common people. It is this artificiality that explains the fact that, while the ruling classes have developed some of the fine arts to a high degree of perfection, the enjoyment of these highly perfected forms of art are confined to narrow circles of upper class connoisseurs; this in its turn leading to greater and greater isolation of these art forms from the people and even to deterioration of its technique. (An example of this is the Kathakali which is a combination of the arts of singing, dancing and acting, each of which has been developed to a high degree, but their combination has led to highly artificial productions—appreciated only by narrow circles.)

It is this artificiality again that led to a situation in which, despite the tremendously great number of authors thrown up by the ruling classes, Malayalam as a language did not develop till very late. Most of the earlier works are written either in Tamil or in Sanskrit, the first really Malayalam literary production being as recent as the fifteenth or sixteenth century.

The consequence of all this artificiality was that the great efflorescence of culture among the ruling classes did not affect the masses of the people who continued to maintain their old forms of singing, dancing, etc. The philosopher Sankara could annihilate Buddhism but his class could not annihilate the folk culture of the overwhelming majority of the people. The Christian and the Muslim got thousands of converts from among the indigenous people but they too could not destroy the various forms of the folk culture of those whom they converted.

It is not in the field of culture alone that this artificiality expressed itself. It is the same in the family system which seems so strange to an outsider.

The system of imitable joint families, in its twin forms of patriarchy and matriarchy, is admirably suited to the development of private property since it prevents the division of the wealth accumulated by the family into small bits of property each owned by a particular branch of the family. (Kerala is one of the few places where the Mitakshara Hindu Law does not apply. It has a local law which prohibits the division of family property unless each and every single member of the family agrees to the division.)

Now, the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, from group marriages of various kinds to the system of the monogamous family, takes place at a time when it is necessary to facilitate the passing of property from generation to generation. The conditions of social development in Kerala did not require such a transition since the joint family in its twin forms of patriarchy and matriarchy served the same purpose, with the additional advantage, as explained above, that it prevented the dissolution of the family into numerous branches and the consequent division of family property. This latter precaution was not necessary outside Kerala where the main form of property, land, was in any case communal and did not stand any risk of being divided. It is only in Kerala that land had ceased to be the property of the village communes and that, if the accumulated wealth was to be preserved intact, division of the family had to be prohibited.

Once this particular form of the family was founded there was no need to further advance towards monogamy. All the forms and types of marriages that had already been evolved needed only to be brought within the framework of this system of imitable joint families. Thus was established the patriarchal joint family of the Namboodiri with strict rules of fidelity for the woman and polygamy, concubinage, etc., for the man. The matriarchal joint family of the Nayar with free marriages and easy divorces was also thus established. This matriarchal family had no strict rules of marital fidelity of the woman who was quite free in sexual relationships. The establishment of these two main types of families by the upper castes helped all the lower castes to preserve the type of family and marriage that they had already evolved and did not impose on them the type of family and marriage adopted by their brethren outside Kerala. It is thus that the process of transition from group marriages and matriarchy to

the monogamous patriarchal family was arrested and a peculiar form of family and marriage evolved in Kerala.

It is only when these artificial elements of the superstructure are destroyed, only when a superstructure that is completely in accordance with the basis is built up, that this artificiality of the ideological, family and social system can be ended. This is a task which remains to be done to this day because the further development of the social system—from the downfall of the Empire of the Perumals to the beginning of British domination, from the beginning of British domination to the formal transfer of power from British to Indian hands, and from the formal transfer of power to this day—has not done away with the domination of an ideological system alien to the soil of Kerala; nay more, even those elements of the basis and the political superstructure that were natural to the soil at the time of the Perumals were destroyed in the course of the centuries since the downfall of their Empire, particularly since the western imperialist rulers established their suzerainty in Kerala.

This does not of course mean that the alien ideological system that made our social and cultural life artificial has remained in the same form to this day. Later developments in the economic and political fields have certainly influenced our social and cultural life. The fact however remains that, in spite of all these developments, the isolation of the ruling classes from the common people, the consequent divorce between the ideology created by the ruling classes and the social and cultural life of the people, has not diminished; it has, if anything, increased. That is why, as we shall see later on, the modern national-democratic movement has unleashed a powerful movement for destroying the system of the old religious, philosophical, legal, family and other beliefs and practices and the institutions corresponding to them. The working class as the leader of this national-democratic movement cannot close its eyes to this task; it alone can build a superstructure that is in keeping with the basis, in keeping with the needs of social development.

## *Chapter IV*

### THE BIRTH OF A NATION

It is the common practice of the bourgeois champions of United Kerala to consider the fall of the Perumals as an unfortunate accident in history. It appears to them as if a nationality that had from the beginning been united was on that day divided by the arbitrary will of the last of the Perumals who partitioned his empire among his sons, nephews and other relatives, as the traditional account of the fall of the Empire says.

This, as we have seen, is unhistorical: the Empire of the Perumals tumbled down not because of the caprice of the last of the emperors but because the material basis for the continuation of such an empire was absent in the Kerala of that epoch. As a matter of fact, an accidental character can be attributed, if at all, to the formation of the Empire, rather than to its disruption, since, as we have seen, it was formed on a soil quite unsuited to any and all kinds of centralised empires. It was just because its existence was accidental (in so far as any historical phenomenon can be spoken of as being an accident) that that empire collapsed like a house of cards.

This however is not all. Not only is it a distortion of history to say that the fall of the Perumals meant the disruption of a united nation; it is true, on the other hand, that it was in the centuries after the disruption of that Empire that, for the first time in history, the nation of Kerala began to take shape. It was just when the rulers of the petty kingdoms in Kerala (numbering about 2 dozens) were fighting among themselves that the various tribes and castes inhabiting the tract of land that is present-day Kerala began to mark themselves off from their Tamil, Tulu and other neighbours and to unite themselves as Malayalees. Nay more, it was these very internecine quarrels—or, rather, the material conditions that gave birth to these quarrels—of the rulers, so loudly and persistently mourned by the present-day champions of United Kerala,

that constituted the biggest and most vital factor that contributed to the birth of the nation.

A conglomeration of several tribes, each of which leads its own distinctive tribal life and has its own distinctive tribal character but has the common characteristics of those relations of production that are known to historical science as primitive communal; a conglomeration of castes, each of which leads its own distinctive caste life and has its own distinctive caste character but all of which are united by the caste rules of Hindu society; the organisation of all the tribes and castes inhabiting a particular territory under the political-administrative authority of a ruler and the administrative machine under his control—these are the three phases through which Kerala, like other parts of India, passed in the prehistoric, and what may be called the early historic period, i.e. the period upto the fall of the Perumals.

It was only with respect to the character of the State machine built up in the last of the three phases mentioned above that Kerala differs from the other parts of India. While the need of a central organisation for the development of irrigation led to a centralised imperial State in other parts of India, the absence of this need made for a State with a far smaller area under its control in Kerala. While the bigger size of territory subjected to the authority of the State plus the communal ownership of land made the emperors the source of all authority, both in theory and practice, in other parts of India, the smaller size of territory plus private property in land led in Kerala to a system in which the feudal chieftains—Naduvazhi, Desavazhi, etc.,—shared power with the king.

This difference in the character of the state machines in Kerala and other parts of India and the consequent failure of the attempt to transplant the all-India type of state to the soil of Kerala, does not mean that, with the disruption of the all-India type of state, the state itself ceased to exist in Kerala. Nor does it mean that with the reduction in size of the territory administered by the ruler—from the empire of the Perumals to the 2 dozen or so petty principalities—the development of society from tribal and caste to the territorial organisation was reversed. The fall of the Perumals was, in other words, only the formal declaration of the failure of a particular type of the territorial State organisation and its substitution by another, and not a going back to the tribal and caste organisations of the earlier epochs.

The social and state system that was set up in Kerala after the break-up of the Empire of the Perumals was an adaptation of the village community, so vividly described by Marx in his "Capital", to the conditions of a private property in land. Land is not "tilled in common" and hence its produce is not "divided among the members"; it is, on the other hand, tilled individually by each cultivator who however has to share its produce with the landlord. Nor are the dozen or so of individuals, described by Marx as part of the Indian village community, "maintained at the expense of the whole community" as in other parts of India; these dozen individuals and several others were each of them given same sort of right on land itself or on its produce. Thus was created the system described as follows by the late Mr. Logan:

"The unit of the Hindu system was the family, not the individual. An association of families formed a body or corporate guild. These corporate bodies each had distinct functions to perform in the body politic, and those functions were in old times strictly hereditary.... The Nayers were the people of 'the eye', 'the hand' and 'the order' and it was their duty 'to prevent the rights from being curtailed or suffered to fall into disuse'. The Kanam comes from the Dravidian word kanika (:to see or to be seen) and the root from which the verb is derived is kan (: the eye).... So that kanam in its original sense seems to have denoted this function of theirs in the body politic.... But what was this supervision right (kanam)? The kon (shepherd, king) and the pathi (lord, master) had shares of the produce due to them as the persons of authority in the land. And the specific word to denote these shares was pattom signifying the padu's (:authority's) varam (:share).... The Nayers were no doubt spread over the whole face of the country protecting all rights, suffering none to fall into disuse, and at the same time supervising the cultivation of the land and collecting the kon or king's share of the produce, the public land revenue in fact....

"All the state functionaries employed had well-defined shares of the produce set apart for them. The kon or king had his share. The pathi or overlord (the hereditary grantee apparently if there chanced to be one) had likewise a share. And if there was no such pathi or hereditary grantee, then it seems his share went to the general

body of protectors and supervisors—the ‘Six Hundred’—the Nayer guild, the kanakkars.

“But when the right of the Perumal came suddenly to an end, their (Kon’s) share of the produce, was, in Malabar at least, certainly not passed on to the chieftains who in some measure supplied the Perumal’s place.... The chieftains certainly had revenues from their demesne lands, but from the lands of the bulk of those subject to them they levied nothing. The chieftains were hereditary holders (jenmis) of the lands from which they derived a share of the produce, and on the other hand, the bulk of their subjects—the headmen of the Nayer protector guild—had likewise become hereditary holders (jenmis) of their lands by usurping the kon’s share of produce....

“If the fundamental idea of the Malayalee land tenures is borne in mind, namely, that the land was made over in tract to certain classes for cultivation, the above will be seen to be a most natural outcome of the Hindu system.”

Thus was created the system of feudal landlordism, the system under which the jenmi, kanamdar and other categories of non-cultivating owners as well as the actually cultivating tenants has each of them his allotted share of the produce. It is this system that was subsequently modified and perfected by the British and continues to this day. It is therefore a target for well deserved condemnation at the hands of all modern democrats. But, as Engels said with regard to slavery, “we are compelled to say—however contradictory and heretical it may appear—that its introduction under the conditions of that time was a great step forward.... It is clear that so long as human labour was still so little productive that it provided but a small surplus over and above the necessary means of subsistence, any increase of the productive forces, extension of trade, development of the state and of law, or beginning of art and science, was only possible by means of a greater division of labour. And the necessary basis for this was the great division of labour between the masses discharging simple manual labour and the few privileged persons directing labour, conducting trade and public affairs, and, at a later stage, occupying themselves with art and science.” Hence, while fighting our utmost to smash the present system of feudal landlordism, we should recognise, again as Engels did, that “it

is very easy to inveigh against it in general terms and to give vent to high moral indignation at such infamies. Unfortunately, all that this conveys is only what everyone knows, namely, that these institutions are no longer in accord with our present conditions and our sentiments, which these conditions determine."

It was on the soil of the system of feudal landlordism that the various tribes and castes inhabiting present-day Kerala started developing as a distinct nationality. For, it was the division of labour between the manual and intellectual workers and the development of the latter from generation to generation, made possible by the allotment of a definite share of the produce to the classes and castes that did not engage themselves in the direct process of production, that helped the unification of several dialects into a national language—the first criterion of a nation.

We have seen that Malayalam as a distinct literary language developed at a very late stage in our history and that it was subjected very much, first to Tamil and then to Sanskrit. But we find that, in the centuries after the fall of the Perumals, literary works in Malayalam begin to get more and more freed from the clutches of both these languages and give birth to a really new national language. Both in poems and other artistic creative works as well as in the State records of different feudal rulers, we find a gradual development of style that has the characteristics of the language of a developing nationality. This process reached such an advanced stage by the 16th and 17th centuries that that period may well be considered to be the period of the formation of real national literature. We find in this period that the works of literature are not merely translations or weak adaptations or imitations of some Sanskrit authors but original works (not of course original in the themes adopted but certainly original in the style, imagery used, etc.); nay more, the style and technique of writing have become so popular that these works have become the classical works studied in every home, and continue to be so even today.

It is not however only for the emergence of a national language that the centuries after the fall of the Perumals is remarkable. An equally remarkable flowering of arts in general also took place in this period. Hindu temples, Christian churches and Muslim mosques became the centres of attraction for lakhs of common people who were entertained and

enlightened through the various forms of religio-cultural activity; it was through these that the kathakali, the ottamthullal, the kuthu, etc. developed and acquired the status of national arts. The artistes who developed these art forms and the audiences attracted by them, have together created through generations, a sum total of cultural sensitiveness that has come to be part of the distinctive psychological make-up of the Malayali.

It is true that most of these works of literature, most of these art forms, arose within the narrow compass of one caste or a group of castes: the classical literary works of Malayalam are mostly by Hindu authors and deal with Hindu religious themes; so are kathakali and other arts of a mainly Hindu origin. It is also true that many of these national arts and literary works were rather confined to upper-class circles. Nevertheless, these works of literature and art forms have laid the basis for the creation of a style and technique that surpasses all castes and is truly national. Furthermore, men of culture, drawn of course from the upper classes, of all castes, began to appreciate and even adopt this style and technique in their own particular caste or religious circle (e.g. The chavittunatakam of the Christian is an adaptation of the Hindu's kathakali).

This flowering of literature and the arts was nothing but the expression of the development of that "community of economic life, economic cohesion" which, according to Comrade Stalin, is one of the characteristics of a nation. It was, as we have seen, the absence of this community of economic life that led to the fall of both the Chera and the Perumal Empires. But the development of production and exchange which took place after the fall of the Perumals—the introduction of non-food crops like cocoanut; the adoption of certain processes of utilising primary produce for further production; the development and perfection of some crafts; exchange of many products locally or even with the outside world, etc.—led to the development of domestic and foreign trade, greater and greater use of money, mortgage or sale-purchase of land, etc. Thus was emerging, slowly and through generations but nonetheless unmistakably, that prerequisite for the formation of a nation—the national market. It was this, as is well known, which attracted first the Arabs, then the Portuguese, then again the Dutch and lastly the British, to the coastal

**towns of Calicut, Cochin, Quilon etc.** where they opened their factories and started trade.

The very theory of the unity of Malayalees as a nationality referred to at the beginning of this chapter—the theory that the disruption of the Perumal Empire into a number of petty kingdoms was an unfortunate accident—is the reflection in social consciousness of this economic reality, the reality of the growing national market. For, although the centralised imperial state was an institution unsuited to the soil of Kerala in the ancient and early mediaeval days, although therefore the Chera and the Perumal Empires were bound to collapse at the time when they were sought to be set up, the centuries after the fall of the Perumals saw such an increase in production and such an expansion of the market that the system of petty kingdoms, established on the ruins of the Perumal Empire, was growingly becoming out of date. The process of strong rulers devouring the neighbouring kingdoms and transforming the rulers of these neighbouring kingdoms into ordinary feudal chieftains, or worse still, ordinary jenmis, was increasingly taking place. It was this that led to the destruction of those obstacles to trade between neighbouring kingdoms which are inevitable in the system of petty kingdoms that was set up after the fall of the Perumals.

The Zamorin of Calicut and the Rajahs of Cochin and Travancore were the rulers that strengthened themselves through this process at the expense of petty kingdoms. Each of these claimed the right to become the Emperor of Kerala—the Zamorin on the ground that he was the direct descendant of the Perumal, because the son of the last Perumal was the founder of the Zamorin dynasty; the Rajah of Cochin on the ground that the sister's son of the last Perumal was the founder of his dynasty; and the Rajah of Travancore on the ground that he is the direct descendant of the Chera emperors. Which one of these three mightiest rulers of Kerala was to become the Emperor—this alone was the issue to be settled.

These rulers however were not satisfied with the expansion in the geographical territory of their kingdoms. They also demanded an extension of their political power, a restriction of the powers of the feudal chieftains, the temple associations etc. They wanted to put an end to the system under which, both militarily as well as administratively, they were dependent on their feudal subordinates. They were, in short, trying to establish a type of state under which the ruler was supreme

and naduvazhis, desavazhis and jenmis were absolutely under the sway of the ruler. With a view to the establishment of such a state system, they organised a system of ruthless terror against their feudal opponents. Many are the stories of conflict between the ruler and his feudal satellites, both the one and the other resorting to identical methods in asserting their rights. As the biographer of one of these rulers says, these rulers "conciliated those who were to be conciliated; fought those who were to be fought; denounced those who deserved it; squeezed those who could be squeezed; helped those who deserved help; destroyed those who were to be destroyed—all this with a view to establish the principle of *One State, One Ruler.*"

Kerala was thus going through the same process of national unification, the setting up of the nation-state etc. as was witnessed in the European countries in the same period. The very internecine struggle of the rulers of Kerala for supremacy, which the champions of United Kerala so much deplore, was an expression of the growing unity of Kerala, of the fact that the obstacles to national unification were being removed in the only manner which is known to history—the use of physical force. The wars waged by the Zamorin and the Rajahs of Cochin and Travancore, both among themselves for the title of the Emperor of Kerala as well as against their respective feudal chieftains, were the media through which the political unity of Kerala was being forged. That is why the rulers who waged those wars were at the same time great patrons of national art and literature, why their courts were the centres to which great scholars, poets and artists thronged. On the soil of the national market was thus rising the national state and national culture. Kerala had thus acquired all the main characteristics of a nation.

## *Chapter V*

### IMPERIALISM COMES ON THE SCENE

(1)

The process described in the last chapter was not a feature unique to Kerala: a process essentially similar to it was also taking place in other parts of India. National languages and national literature were developing, folk culture was flowering into national culture in Maharashtra, Bengal and other parts of India. The 16th and 17 centuries witnessed the emergence of great national poets and writers in almost all the languages of India. The great Mughal Empire was breaking up and foundations were being laid for the establishment of national states. The great Shivaji and other national heroes were coming out as the champions of a new form of social and state organisation—an organisation based on national language and national culture—although many of them were also national oppressors in relation to nationalities other than their own.

The process is thus similar to what took place in Europe where “the British, French, Germans, Italians and others formed themselves into nations at the time of the victorious advance of capitalism and its triumph over feudal disunity” (Stalin). It was taking place however under a severe handicap, viz., the absence of a strong class of merchant capitalists who were, in Europe, “the leaders and masters of the process of the creation of nationalities.” (Lenin)

The characteristic feature of the Indian village community is this: “The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the State, into whose

hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind." (Marx, *Capital*). It was therefore impossible for these village communities to develop a strong class of merchant capitalists as were developed in mediaeval Europe. For, it is only when a substantial part of the product becomes a commodity and when the exchange of commodities plays a major role in the country's economy, that the class of merchant capitalists comes to assume a dominant place in society.

It was thus that leadership in the process of national unification in India was assumed by the non-merchant classes, classes that were not connected directly either with the production or with the exchange of commodities.

It was again this that enabled the merchant capitalists from outside to come to India and dominate our market instead of our merchant capitalists going abroad and dominating foreign markets.

The result was that, while "in Western Europe the nations developed into states" and while "in Eastern Europe multi-national states were formed each consisting of several nationalities" (Stalin), the process in India was of a type different from that of both Western and Eastern Europe. There being no indigenous class of merchant capitalists, it was the merchant capitalists from outside—the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and the British—who, together with the non-capitalist leaders of Indian society, created the national market and politically unified the nations of India. The State which was thus formed was not simply multi-national as in Eastern Europe but a multi-national state dominated by a foreign nationality—the British—assisted by the representatives of the pre-capitalist mode of production, i.e., feudal lords or leaders of the village communities.

Far from helping the growth of nationalities and the establishment of national states, this was a direct hindrance to it as we see even to this day. The unification of India that was brought about by the British was in reality a disruption of the process of national development, a violent check to the emergence of the Malayalis, the Tamils, the Andhras, etc., as distinct nationalities. It was by artificially dividing each of these nationalities into two or more administrative units that the British rulers created their Indian States and British Indian Provinces.

This violent interference of the imperialists did not leave Kerala unaffected as we shall see in the following pages.

## (2)

If ancient and mediaeval Indian society as a whole failed to develop a strong class of merchant capitalists, Kerala developed it still less than the rest of India. We have already seen that the caste system as it was modified to suit the conditions of Kerala did not include a caste of merchants similar to the Vaisyas in the rest of India. This does not of course mean that trade was not a part of the economic life of Kerala, nor that there was nobody who engaged in trade as a profession: the very little effort that was sufficient to gather or even produce such valuable articles as pepper, ivory, other forest produce, etc. had in fact brought Kerala into the arena of international trade as far back as in the prehistoric epoch. All this however was done by people who did not form part of the aristocratic ruling classes who were confined to such pursuits as intellectual study, administration, training in and use of arms, etc.

Hence, increase in production in general, and particularly in the production of such articles as can become commodities, led on the one hand to the development of a merchant class outside the scheme of castes according to the Hindus of Kerala; while, on the other hand, it led to the dependence of the aristocratic ruling classes on these merchants. The Jews and Christians of the centuries before and immediately after Christ were privileged to carry on trade and hence occupied an honoured place in society; they were nevertheless outside the circle of upper class Hindu society. The same happened to the Arabs who came later on and established themselves in Calicut and other places: they too got an honoured place and various privileges from the rulers of the land but were outside the circle of the privileged upper society.

It was however only in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries that the dependence of the indigenous ruling classes on the merchant class assumed such proportions as to threaten the very social order of Kerala. For, it was then that the place of Jews, Christians and Arabs from the Eastern Mediterranean regions was taken by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English from Western Europe. While the former were

the representatives of a social order basically not very different from that of India, the latter represented a social order that was on the eve of gigantic revolutions. Nay more, they were the very people who were carrying out these revolutions in the entire social order, the people who were very fast developing into that class which, "wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations; . . . has substituted for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation; . . . has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe; . . . has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers; . . . has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals". (Marx & Engels, *Manifesto*)

It was as the representative of such a class—not yet developed, of course, into its full stature but in its early stages—that Vasco de Gama landed in Calicut one day in 1498. He was warmly welcomed by the Zamorin of Calicut but, as the Arabs were already entrenched in Calicut, de Gama could not get a foothold there. He therefore went to the other port towns in Kerala—Quilon, Cochin, Cannanore—where he was more welcome. In a few years' time, the Portuguese established themselves safely on the Western coast of Kerala stretching from Goa in the North to Quilon in the South.

The basic policy pursued by the Portuguese in Kerala was to take advantage of the political rivalry between the Zamorin of Calicut and the Rajah of Cochin. The former had already brought all the feudal chieftains in what is present-day South Malabar under his suzerainty, extended his power and influence to a part of what is present-day Cochin and was on the point of overpowering the Rajah of Cochin himself through sheer physical force. He (Cochin) was therefore in desperate need of help in maintaining his position—help which the Portuguese were in a position to give. The Portuguese were themselves in need of an alliance with the Rajah of Cochin not only in order to get facilities for trading but also for them to be in a position to wreak their vengeance on the Arabs in Calicut. It was thus that, in the five successive wars waged between Calicut and Cochin during the 165 years of Portuguese ascendancy (1498-1663), the Rajah of Cochin saved himself from being devoured by the Zamorin; while the Portuguese saved themselves from their Arab rivals.

The alliance between the Portuguese and the Rajah of Cochin led to other similar alliances—those with the Quilon and Cannanore rulers. The terms of all these alliances were substantially the same—fixing the price of pepper, agreeing to give the Portuguese a monopoly in buying pepper, recognising the supremacy of the Portuguese in naval matters, exempting the Portuguese from taxation, giving the Portuguese captain alone the authority to try and punish offenders from among the Portuguese and native Christians, etc. These agreements were thus the beginning of the process through which the rulers of Kerala were surrendering their sovereignty to foreign traders, the process through which what was attempted without effect by the Cheras and the Perumals was accomplished by foreign capitalists.

While the Portuguese were using the Rajah of Cochin against the Zamorin and thus establishing themselves in Kerala, their trade rivals, the Dutch, were becoming a powerful force. They landed on our coasts almost a century after Vasco de Gama but, using the same policy of setting one ruler against his rival, they very rapidly strengthened themselves. An internal family quarrel was taking place at that time in the ruling family of Cochin and one of the princes sought the assistance of the Dutch who had already established themselves in Ceylon. The Dutch seized upon this golden opportunity, helped the prince to ascend the throne and in the process eliminated the Portuguese from their supremacy in Cochin, nay, from Kerala altogether. The Rajah of Cochin who was thus put on the throne by the Dutch became the virtual vassal of the Dutch who were, even in official correspondence, referred to by the Rajah as "the masters." After thus establishing themselves in Cochin, they turned to other princes with several of whom they signed trade pacts.

The Dutch however could not become masters of Kerala because they had a rival in the English. Since the Dutch were very powerful in Cochin, the English turned their attention towards South and North—Cannanore and Tellicherry in the North where they established their factories and Quilon and Trivandrum in the South. Just as the Portuguese used the Raja of Cochin, just as the Dutch used the quarrel in the ruling family of Cochin to establish their virtual rule through a puppet prince, so did the English use the ambitious prince of Venad, Marthanda Varma, to establish their supremacy.

That prince was one of those rulers of Kerala who wanted,

on the one hand, to expand the geographical territory of their kingdoms by annexing neighbouring kingdoms and, on the other hand, to curtail the powers of the feudal chieftains under them. It was he who, in one generation, expanded his kingdom from a petty principality of a few dozen square miles to the present-day Travancore and is thus rightly considered "the Builder of Modern Travancore". He was able to do this only because, he skilfully and successfully utilised the rivalry between the Dutch and the English. The English for their part knew that by strengthening him they were strengthening themselves. Nor did he or his successor fail them, for it was the powerful King of Travancore that was the one supporter that they had in Kerala when they had to fight and overcome the combination of Mysore and the French.

But, as soon as the Dutch and the French-Mysore combination of rivals were overcome, the English treated the Rajah of Travancore in the same way as the Portuguese and the Dutch treated the Rajah of Cochin. The treaty of 1795, its modification by the new treaty of Colonel Munro as Resident-Dewan—all this together made Travancore a tributary kingdom of the English in the full and real sense of the term.

This reduction of Travancore, the strongest of the rulers of Kerala, to the status of a dependent vassal of the English, together with the transfer of the allegiance of the Rajah of Cochin from the Portuguese, the Dutch and Mysore to the English and the assumption of direct English authority in the rest of Kerala made the end of Mysore (Tippu Sultan) the beginning of British rule.

(3)

The establishment of British rule stabilised the political divisions of Kerala as they existed at the end of eighteenth century, i.e., it permanently divided Travancore and Cochin both from each other as well as from the rest of Kerala; it divided the nationally Tamilian parts of South Travancore permanently from the rest of Tamilnad. Thus was the natural process of formation of nationalities artificially checked by the violent interference of a foreign imperialist power.

We will see further on that this intrusion of imperialist power was resisted by the people of Kerala who have written some of the most glorious chapters in the history of the anti-

imperialist movement in India. It however remains true that the ruling classes as a whole acquiesced in this loss of their freedom and the freedom of their subjects. The ruling families of Travancore, Cochin and Calicut gave up their mutual struggle for the title of the Emperor of Kerala, all of them accepting the British as their lord and master. So did the lesser ones of the feudal hierarchy—those Naduvazhis, Desavazhis, Madambis, etc. who survived the process of liquidation started by successive rulers in their attempt to set up a strong administration—accept Britain as the sovereign ruler of the land. The Namboodiris for their part also gave up their claim to be the spiritual leaders of Kerala society and accepted the supremacy of the British in all respects including the spiritual. All sections of the ruling classes were, in fact, trying their utmost to salvage their former glory and, to this end, gain the favour of the new supreme ruler.

The British rulers too knew that they would be unable to stabilise their rule unless they got the willing consent of the former ruling classes, unless they made them loyal adherents of the new regime. They therefore set themselves the task of making such adjustments in the state system which they wanted to set up as would satisfy the former rulers. The acceptance of Travancore and Cochin as separate states ruled by the dynasties that had ruled for centuries was, of course, the first step. But that was not all. Other families like those of the Zamorin of Calicut, the Rajas of Chirakkal, Arakkal, Kottayam, Kadatrad, Walluvanad, etc., were also given various privileges including regular pensions. These families were even allowed the vainglorious formality of succession to the throne; for example, when the eldest male member of one of these families dies, the next seniormost male member is allowed to have performed the formal ceremony of taking the *gadi*. As for the Namboodiris and other non-ruling families, they were given back all the lands that they had once owned and, what is more, were made full owners of these lands with no restrictions whatsoever in their relations with the tenants. The establishment of British rule, therefore, did not deprive any of the former ruling classes of the rights and privileges enjoyed by them, except to the extent that those of them who were ambitious enough to dream of extending their territories were stopped from all further efforts in that direction.

All this however does not mean that things remained as

they were. On the contrary, the very establishment of British rule was the biggest shock administered to the hitherto tranquil social order of Kerala, the order which had been built up through centuries. For, the state system that was set up by the British was meant precisely to further carry forward the process that had started within Kerala's social order — the development of market relations. We will see in the next chapter how the establishment of British rule hastened this process and brought Kerala into the arena of the world market; we will also in subsequent chapters examine the tremendous socio-political changes that followed this process of economic transformation, changes that have made Kerala an active partner in the democratic and socialist revolutionary movements of the world. It is sufficient at this stage to note that the force that brought about these upheavals was the new state system set up by the British.

The changes brought about in the state system of Cochin by Colonel Munro, the British administrator who functioned both as Resident and Diwan of the two states of Cochin and Travancore and who in that capacity made the administrative system of these states such as to serve the needs of British supremacy, are described as follows by the author of the *Cochin State Manual* :

#### *“Administrative Reforms*

“The Karyakars, who were placed in charge of Talukas when the chiefs were divested of their administrative powers, had hitherto combined in themselves all the functions of government. They were not only revenue and executive officers but were Munsiffs, Sub-Magistrates and Police Inspectors. They were now divested of their judicial and police powers, and their duties were confined to the collection of revenue. For the proper administration of justice, two subordinate courts were established at Tripunittura and Trichur in 1812, each presided over by a Hindu and a Christian Judge and a Sastri, and a Huzur Court presided over by four Judges including the Diwan. Justice was to be administered according to the Dharma Sastra and the customs and usages of the country, but a simple code was enacted for the guidance of the judges in the matter of procedure. A force of Police or Tannadars was organised and placed under Tanna Naiks, one for each Taluk, the supervision over the Naiks being

vested in an officer attached to the Huzur under the designation of Daroga. These Tannadars had the duties of the modern police and preventive forces combined in them. Court fees began to be levied according to a definite scale, and stamped 1812 and 1816, a large number of Proclamations and Hukumnamas was issued, defining the duties and powers of judicial, police and other officers. A definite scale of pay was established in the place of the indefinite exactions which the officers had hitherto been authorised to make, and some provision was also made for granting pensions to retired officers. Several of the vexatious imposts which pressed heavily on particular individuals or classes, and transit duties on grain and food stuffs, were abolished, and all arrears of revenue which remained uncollected till 1809 were relinquished. Several roads and bridges were constructed, though of a primitive pattern, and a large number of Sirkar buildings, which had through the neglect of years fallen into a dilapidated condition, were repaired or reconstructed.

#### *"Revenue and Finance"*

"The system of farming land revenue, customs and forests, which had hitherto been in force, was abolished, and Sirkar officers were appointed to collect these revenues directly. Vigorous measures were taken to extract large quantities of teak departmentally, while junglewood and minor forest produce were allowed to be reinoved by the people on payment of duty at the Chaukai (inland customs) stations. Preventive measures were taken to minimise the smuggling of tobacco and pepper which were articles of Sirkar monopoly, and salt was also made a monopoly article. The Devasvams and Uttupuras (religious and charitable institutions), which had in recent years been grossly mismanaged, were placed on a satisfactory footing, and a definite scale of expenditure was laid down for their maintenance. An account department was organised and a system of accounts introduced, similar to the one then obtaining in the Company's territories. Thrity-three vernacular schools were established, one in each Pravritti, with a view to turn out a number of young men fit to be entertained as writers and accountants under the Sirkar. The successful carrying out of these measures obviously involved an immense deal of labour and diffi-

culty, but Colonel Munro and Captain Blacker had the satisfaction of seeing their labours bear excellent fruit. The land revenue rose from Rs. 2,85,000 in 1811-12 to Rs. 3,27,000 in 1816-17, tobacco from 21,000 to 157,000, customs from 25,000 to 35,000, salt from 2,000 to 63,000 and forest from 10,000 to 62,000, and the total revenue from 4,96,000 to 7,55,000. The Raja's Government was thus enabled during these seven years to pay off all arrears of subsidy and war indemnity and also the major portion of the debts due to private parties, and His Highness expressed his immense satisfaction at these achievements in a remarkable letter to the Governor-General. 'Since Colonel John Munro was appointed Resident in my country in the year 1811,' he said, 'that gentleman has by his indefatigable exertions and vigilance rescued me from an ocean of debt in which I was unfortunately involved by the corrupt and treacherous conduct of my ministers, and has enabled myself, my family and my subjects now to live happy and unconcerned, which favourable circumstances I cannot in justice avoid bringing to the notice of your Lordship in Council.'"

That the same changes were made in Travancore too has been explained in the *Travancore State Manual* (Vol. IV, pp. 2-6.)

Needless to say that this was in keeping with what was done in Malabar and other parts of India. The only difference was that while in Malabar and other parts of "British India", the Collector or other British officials were the direct authorities appointed by and responsible to the representatives of the British Emperor (the Governors and the Governor General), the Diwan, Peshkar and other officials in the Indian States were formally under the authority of the Rajah who was formally a 'sovereign' monarch allied to the British. How sovereign the ruler is was seen on a number of occasions in various Indian States. Cochin too saw it during the First World War when the then ruler of the State, suspected by the British to be conspiring with the Germans, was forced to abdicate. The fact is that, with all the paraphernalia of a ruling dynasty, the Cochin and Travancore families were mere cogs in the wheels of efficient administration, real authority resting not with these rulers but with the Resident or Political Agent and through him, the Viceroy of India.

These cogs in the wheels of administration were, however, maintained by the British because they could not risk the dissatisfaction that their elimination might cause in the feudal ruling circles. The main purpose for which the state system was reorganised by the British being the most efficient exploitation of the people, it was necessary for them to associate as wide sections of the former ruling circles as possible with the administration of the country. Nothing would have served this purpose more than the maintenance of the ruling dynasties of Cochin and Travancore in the full enjoyment of their former privileges, provided of course they were made harmless in the actual enjoyment of political authority. It may be mentioned in anticipation that this is the very policy that is being continued by the Congress after "the transfer of power to India": the policy of integration and merger of Indian States has not only maintained the privileges of the ruling families but also continued the artificial division of nationalities like Kerala, Tamilnad, Andhra, etc.

The establishment of British rule therefore meant that all that was progressive in the mediaeval social order of Kerala was suppressed and all that was reactionary was stabilised. The cherished desire of successive generations for the unity of Kerala was suppressed but the agents through which that desire was given expression to — the ruling families of Kerala — were maintained. The efforts at reforming and modernising the administrative system, made by successive rulers of various kingdoms, were carried forward not to lay the basis for reforming and modernising the entire social system, but to enable the British rulers to carry on their alien rule. The powers and privileges of the former ruling classes were curtailed not in order to introduce democracy but in order to establish a foreign imperialist grip over the country. It was to this establishment of imperialist rule that the former ruling classes willingly consented.

*Chapter VI*  
**FROM MILITARIST-FEUDAL TO  
COLONIAL-FEUDAL ECONOMY**

(1)

We have seen in earlier chapters that the Empire of the Cheras and the Empire of the Perumals were artificial efforts to create a centralised administration and that they failed to stabilise themselves because of their very artificiality. We have also seen that what made those earlier efforts artificial was the absence of the economic basis for such a centralised administration in those earlier days—the need for common irrigation as in other parts of India—which however was, in the later centuries, compensated for by the creation of a national market. It was on the soil of this national market that the petty feudal chieftains of Kerala were, one by one, being devoured and bigger kingdoms set up.

The establishment of British rule reacted on this process in a peculiar way. On the one hand, it accelerated the creation of the national market and made the biggest transformation in the mode of production, i.e., it replaced the production of articles mainly for one's own use by production for the market. On the other hand, it prevented the natural development from the production of commodities to capitalist production—production of commodities on the basis of modern large-scale industry and the application of modern science to agriculture. The result is that, while production as a whole has taken gigantic strides forward, this advance of production has not made those fundamental changes in the social order that usually accompany the capitalist transformation of a country's economy.

This can be seen from the fact that, even after a century and a half of British rule, Kerala still has a predominantly agrarian economy. The prosperity and poverty of individuals

and families are even today judged on the basis of how much land they own, as they used to be judged in pre-British days.

According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, 1173 families (out of a total of 1 lakh families whose family budgets were investigated into) had an annual income of Rs. 1200 and above. Out of these 1173 families, however, there are 520 families whose means of livelihood are the professions, i.e., occupations which are not productive in the scientific sense of the term. Out of the remaining 653 families, 325 are those whose main source of income is land.

According to the same survey, there are 20,199 families with an annual income of below Rs. 60. 11,353 of these are absolutely landless. In the next income group (Rs. 60 to Rs. 120), there are 38,992 families of which 17,533 are landless. Thus the two lowest income groups (which together constitute 60% of the total families) have 56.8% and 44.9% respectively with absolutely no land. On the other hand, in the two highest income groups—that above Rs. 3600 and that between Rs. 2400 and Rs. 3600—8% (15 families out of 181) and 15% (23 out of 183) alone are absolutely landless.

Furthermore, in the 4 lowest income groups (those below Rs. 300 per year) together, 43% (38,877 families out of 90,152) are landless while in the 4 highest income groups (those above Rs. 1,200) only 16 per cent (190 families out of 1,173) are landless.

According to an earlier (1931) survey, the total national income of Travancore is just over Rs. 20 crores of which over 50 per cent (Rs.  $10\frac{1}{2}$  crores), is income from land (including wages of agricultural labourers, rent of landlords, interest on capital and profit of cultivation). When it is borne in mind that the balance includes the income of professionals and such other categories as are not productive in the scientific sense of the term, it becomes clear that the main source of national income is agriculture.

Figures for such over-all economic conditions are not available for the other parts of Kerala—Cochin and Malabar. In 1936, however, the Government of Cochin conducted a survey of some typical villages in the State. Figures collected in the course of this survey show that in the case of the rural economy of Cochin, agriculture plays a predominant role.

For example, the total assets of all the families in Anthikkad village are valued at Rs. 12,58,788. Out of this, Rs. 7,13,946 or 56.7 per cent is the value of land itself. Simi-

larly, the villages of Chundal, Eruttempadi, Pattancheri, Ven-ganallur, Vallivattom and Tiruvazhiyad have 63.7 per cent, 53.7 per cent, 42.5 per cent, 54.2 per cent, 66.7 per cent, 62.4 per cent respectively of their total assets in the form of value of land. Adding up the figures of all these 7 villages, we find that 55.4 per cent of the total assets (Rs. 40,59,704 out of Rs. 73,68,753) is value of land.

This is not all. There are other items that should be taken into account—the value of buildings, improvements on land, agricultural implements, and amounts lent out. Some of these items are solely and directly related to land (value of improvements on land and value of agricultural implements) while others are also almost entirely connected with land (e.g., the major part of amounts lent out is the indebtedness of either cultivators or landlords). It will therefore be reasonable to include these also in the category of assets based on land. All these together constitute 91.4 per cent, 95.9 per cent, 85.3 per cent, 90 per cent, 92.8 per cent, 93.6 per cent and 95.3 per cent respectively in the above villages.

It may thus be taken that no less than 90 per cent of the total assets of an average village in Cochin is directly or indirectly related to agriculture. If it is borne in mind that even such instruments of production as the handloom, other implements of artisans (carpenter, smith, fisherman, boatman, etc.), as well as the assets of some of the small industrial establishments that exist in the village, are included in the balance, it will be seen that, in the villages of Cochin, it is agriculture that dominates over other forms of economic activity.

The inclusion of urban areas will of course relieve this domination of land to a certain extent. But it would not alter the picture basically. For, apart from the two textile mills and one large scale Oil-Soap Works (Tatas), most of the industrial establishments in Cochin are of small or medium size. It would therefore be correct to say that even if the rural and urban areas are added together, it is agriculture that dominates over other forms of economic activity.

## (2)

The domination of land over economy as a whole does not however mean that land plays the same role in economy

as it did in pre-British days. Land has, on the other hand, undergone a big transformation.

It is of course true, as we have already seen, that, unlike other parts of India, in Kerala land had started developing as private property even in pre-British days. But this development of proprietary interests in land was taking place within the framework of a predominantly natural economy. The major part of what was produced on land was being consumed within the village or in the neighbouring villages while the major part of consumption goods was locally-produced. This order of natural economy received a shattering blow from the British rulers and, as a consequence thereof, land is no more being used for the production of goods used by the producer himself, but for the production of commodities.

Take rice, 4 or 5 centuries ago, Kerala was self-sufficient with regard to this primary and most essential need of human life. Today, however, local production is less than 50 per cent of consumption, nearly 60 per cent of the local needs being supplied from abroad. No other province in India is so deficit as regards food as Kerala.

According to the *Travancore State Manual*, the average annual import of rice during the 7 years 1050 to 1056 Malayalam Era (1874-5 to 1880-1 A.D.) was to the value of Rs. 12,11,611. This grew in the next 5 decades to Rs. 15,00,380, Rs. 24,70,120; Rs. 52,22,378; Rs. 141,61,305; and Rs. 264,20,189 respectively. Leaving for the moment the last two decades (1911-12 to 1930-31) as those falling in the period of the First World War and after, it is to be noted that the value of rice imported per year rose, in the course of 37 years (1874-75 to 1910-11) from Rs. 12,11,611 to Rs. 52,22,378, i.e. more than a four-fold increase.

Just as in the case of rice, so in the case of other consumption goods, imports have grown tremendously. According to the same publication, 37.5 per cent of imports into Travancore in the year 1113 Malayalam Era (1937-38) consisted of foodgrains. The import of cloth, kerosene and tobacco account for 11 per cent, 7 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively, thus adding up to 59.2 per cent for the most essential consumption goods. (It is of course true that these import figures include imports from other parts of India but that does not affect the generalisation made here, since this qualification would apply to total imports also. Besides, the major part of foodgrains imported consists of Burma and Siam rice.)

Along with this increase in the imports of rice and other essential consumption goods, there has also taken place an increase in the exports of certain commodities. For example:

—The export of coffee in 1029 Malayalam Era (1853-54 A.D.) was to the value of Rs. 6,553. It grew to Rs. 37,370 in the next 8 years and to Rs. 1,87,875 in the next 76 years.

—There was no export of rubber, tea or cardamom in 1029 Malayalam Era (1853-54 A.D.). But by the year 1113 (1937-38), these commodities were exported to the value of Rs. 74,89,464; Rs. 2,25,61,823 and Rs. 33,01,502 respectively.

—The export of cocoanut oil rose from Rs. 1,27,395 in 1853-4 to Rs. 1,34,649 in 1861-62 and to Rs. 59,51,499 in 1937-38. Similarly, the export of coir rose from Rs. 92,427 to Rs. 5,93,926 and Rs. 1,64,10,624 in the same period.

Furthermore, just as 59.2 per cent of the imports into Travancore in 1937-38 consisted of essential consumption goods, so did 65.1 per cent of that year's exports consist of raw materials or semi-manufactured goods made out of the cash crops produced in Kerala. (Exact figures are: tea—23.9 per cent; rubber—8 per cent; other plantation products—4.5 per cent; coir—17.4 per cent; cocoanut oil—6.3 per cent; copra and other cocoanut produce—5.8 per cent. Thus, plantations account for 36.4 per cent of Travancore's exports while a further 29.5 per cent is made up by cocoanut produce.)

Such increases in the exports of these commodities have been based on tremendous changes in the pattern of agriculture—increase in acreage under and in the volume of production of cash crops.

The rapidity with which the cultivation of certain cash crops is increasing can be seen from the following extracts from the *Travancore State Manual*:

“According to official estimates, the area under cocoanut cultivation in 1934-35, was 5,66,590 acres which was about 50 per cent higher than what it was 16 years previously. This is rather an under-estimate.” (Vol. III, p. 351).

"The first clearing for coffee in Travancore was made by D. Munro in the Rope Estate in 1862." (*Ibid.*, p. 370).

"Tea is a very important plantation crop in Travancore. Although the tea bush has been cultivated for over a century in Northern India, it is only within comparatively recent times that it has been introduced into Southern India. It is difficult to say where tea was first planted in South India. But, if Travancore cannot actually claim this distinction for certain, at all events it was flourishing in this State within a very few years of its first introduction in the South." (*Ibid.*, p. 372)

The *State Manual* also points out that, while the acreage under paddy in 1936-37 was 6,63,184, cocoanut was a close second to it with its 5,77,418 acres. The three plantation crops of rubber (97,125 acres), tea (77,726 acres) and coffee (6,279 acres) together constitute more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the acreage under paddy. The acreage under cocoanut, sugarcane, rubber, tea, coffee, pepper and ginger together is 8,16,335 which is 123 per cent of the acreage under paddy (6,63,184).

There is one crop which is partly a food and partly an industrial crop—tapioca. Part of it is used as food (this is the staple food of the poor people and is taken in place of vegetables by even the upper classes; its use as food increased enormously during the war and famine) while a part of it is made into starch and exported to Bombay and other industrial centres for industrial use. Even if the whole of this is considered as used for food, acreage under food crops (paddy and tapioca together) will be only 10,86,876, i.e., 2,70,541 more than the major cash crops.

Similarly, in Malabar, the total acreage under paddy in the year 1937-38 was 8,64,825. The three cash crops of cocoanut, arecanut and pepper alone together come to 5,32,787 acres, i.e., nearly  $2\frac{1}{3}$  of the acreage under paddy. If to this is added the acreage under other cash crops as well as the big plantations (tea, coffee, oranges, etc.) in Wynnaad (which are as large and extensive as the plantations in Travancore), the total acreage under cash crops in Malabar will come to nearly 50 per cent of the total land under cultivation (Figures for Malabar are taken from the 1940 *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee*).

It is thus clear that agriculture in Kerala is directed towards the production of cash crops that are to be sold in

the world market and that only the barest minimum of goods are produced for the purpose of local consumption. Every peasant is today dependent on the conditions of the world market in a two-fold way: he has to buy commodities produced abroad; he has to sell his produce abroad.

## (3)

The substitution of natural economy by commodity economy has naturally meant the growth of certain strata of society which were either totally absent or very insignificant in the old days.

Writing in 1820, Ward and Corner said in their *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*: "Subsistence is almost entirely derived from agricultural labour, nor do the temptations of commerce attract even the wealthier classes from rural pursuits which are most esteemed, the handicraft professions being abandoned to the lower ranks."

Today, however, a large section of people has grown up whose main source of livelihood is trade, transport, etc. For instance, the 1831 Economic Census of Travancore shows that, while the biggest section of "persons following different occupations" among the earners is still "agricultural labour", the next biggest section is "Trade". (2,63,385 and 1,20,293). It also shows that, while those employed in the production of primary commodities (i.e. agricultural labour, estate 'coolies', unskilled labourers, persons employed in the exploitation of minerals and fishermen) add up to a total of 4,28,321, those who take up tertiary occupations (i.e., transport, trade, fish trade, public administration, professions and liberal arts) add up to a total of 2,41,935. This 2,41,935 employed on tertiary occupations is 40,276 more than those engaged in secondary occupations (industries) which is 201,659. Trade, transport, professions and arts have thus become a far bigger force today than they were over a century ago.

A change has also taken place in the very character of agricultural labour and handicrafts: while the semi-serf agricultural labourers in pre-British days were tied to particular plots of land and their masters, while each of the handicraftsmen was tied to a particular village where he had to work and whose inhabitants had to feed him, the British brought

about, although to a limited extent, production relations based on wage-labour and capital.

It has already been shown how the cultivation of food crops has been and is being replaced by the cultivation of cash crops. This has naturally led to the growth of capitalist farms.

The most developed form of these capitalist farms is the plantation — tea, rubber, coffee, cardamom, lemon grass etc. According to the Travancore Depression Enquiry Committee, the acreage under rubber is 61,986; tea, 74,618; cardamom, 30,000 and lemon grass, 12,000—a total of 178,604 acres. This out of a total cultivated area of 21,97,000 acres works out to 1/12 of the total. Moreover, the total paid-up capital of plantations working in Travancore is, according to the Administrative Report, over Rs 10 crores.

Such figures could not be collected for Cochin or Malabar but more or less the same picture obtains there also. In fact, one whole taluk (out of 9) in Malabar is full of plantations.

There is another type of cultivation which also involves large scale employment of wage-labour and capital. This is called *Kol* and *Kayal*. The peculiarity of this is that it requires the employment of a large amount of labour and capital for draining the land of water. (This was done in the old days through hundreds of wheels worked by human labour. This method has now been replaced by the use of Diesel engines.) The area under this mode of cultivation in Cochin is, according to the Cochin Agrarian Reforms Committee, 18,761 acres. This is 9 per cent of the total land under paddy (2,06,000 acres). As for Travancore, the *Kuttanad* area (the most extensive area of *Kayal* cultivation in Travancore) alone comes to 1,67,176 acres — nearly 25 per cent of the total land under paddy (7,01,306 acres) and 7½ per cent of the total acreage under cultivation (21,97,000 acres).

Wage-labour-capital relations are however not confined to plantations or *Kol-Kayal* cultivation alone. A major portion of cocoanut farms on the coastal areas is under the direct possession of the owner who employs labourers during the seasons in which some work is to be carried out. Similarly, a good portion of land under such cash crops as tapioca, bananas etc., is also cultivated through wage-labour.

Apart from these areas of land under capitalist cultivation, there are also a large number of rural industries where capitalist relations have developed. The most widespread of these

industries is coir making. Tens of thousands of people, mainly women, are employed in soaking the outer cover (not the shell) in water, taking it out when sufficiently soaked, beating it and taking the fibre out and spinning it into yarn. These are employed by some capitalist who buys the cocoanut, employs labour and makes profit out of the business. Similarly, there are other industries like drying the cocoanut kernel so as to make it into copra, fishing, rowing of boats (country craft) etc. It is out of these rural industries that the comparatively modern industries like the coir factories, oil mills, fisheries, motor and steamboats etc. have grown up. For every urban factory in these industries, there are thousands of men, women and children employed in the villages to carry out the earlier processes.

For example, in 7 of the 8 villages surveyed in Cochin in 1936 (I could not get the report of the eighth village) the percentage of agricultural labour to total families is 39.1, 38.7, 59.3, 64.4, 54.7, 41.7 and 72.9 respectively. Again, as per the 1931 Census, the percentage of agricultural labourers to the total population who depend on land as their means of livelihood is 42.9, 61 and 37.9 respectively in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. These census figures however exclude several categories of rural wage-labourers like fishermen, boatmen, plantation labourers, labourers employed in rural industries etc. There is no doubt that, if all these are added to the figures of those who are strictly called agricultural labourers, the percentage of wage-labourers to total population will be far higher.

Another indication of this tendency is the growth of Joint Stock Companies regarding which the *Travancore State Manual* says :

“A large portion of the trade of the country is run by commercial corporations registered under Company Law. The necessity for legalising the incorporation, regulation and winding up of trading companies and other associations arose in Travancore in 1063 Malayalam Era (1887-8 A.D.) The immediate necessity arose out of the formation of a joint stock company to set up a paper mill at Punalur to utilise a great deal of raw material which was being wasted. Incidentally it was thought necessary to encourage the combination of capital and skill in industrial and other undertakings which were too much

for the individual. Regulation I of 1063 was, therefore, passed to enable the promotion of joint stock enterprise. The Regulation merely enacted that the Indian Companies Act of 1882, as amended by Act VI of 1887, shall *mutatis mutandis* come into force in Travancore. The above regulation was repealed by the existing Regulation of 1092 M.E. (1916-7) as the provisions of the earlier Regulation were found insufficient to meet the present requirements. This was followed by a boom in company formations." (Vol. III, p. 666)

The statistics given in the *State Manual* show that, in the 10-year period 1102-1111 M.E. (1926-7 to 1935-6), the total number of Joint Stock Companies in operation rose from 152 to 390, while their paid-up capital rose from Rs. 84,81,341 to Rs. 1,87,58,898. It should be noted that this increase to more than double the number and paid-up capital of joint stock companies was taking place at a time which includes the whole period of the world economic crisis of 1929-32.

It is significant that it was in this period that the Indian business community in Travancore was organising itself: the Alleppey Chamber of Commerce was started in 1929, the South-Travancore Chamber of Commerce in 1935 and the Trivandrum Chamber at about the same time. These three Chambers of Commerce represent the Indian business community in three main areas of Travancore, as distinct from the Travancore Chamber of Commerce which, though formally open to both European and Indian businessmen, is really dominated by the Europeans.

While it is thus clear that Kerala was also developing its own bourgeoisie, it should be noted that it was developing in the conditions of colonial economy, i.e., in the conditions under which "real industrialisation of the colonial country, in particular the building up of a flourishing engineering industry, which might make possible the independent development of the productive forces of the country, is not accelerated but, on the contrary, is hindered by the metropolis." (Communist International, Colonial Thesis, p. 15) Only 7 per cent of those who are counted as being engaged in industries—24,511 out of 3,51,076—are factory workers in Travancore, the rest being engaged in cottage industries. (*State Manual*, Vol. III, p. 42.)

It is also to be noted that, out of 390 joint stock companies registered in Travancore and functioning in 1111 M.E.

(1935-36), 244 come under the category of Banking and Loan, 26 under Insurance and 1 under Nidhis and Chit associations—a total of 271 engaged in money-lending. Seven others are engaged in transit and transport and 5 in trading, while 38 are engaged in plantation work, thus leaving only 69 companies which may have anything to do with manufacture proper. Even out of these, 13 relate to “printing, publishing and stationery”, 3 are classified as “miscellaneous”, leaving 53 companies engaged in industrial production proper. Only one out of these 53 is a cotton mill, another is a paper mill, a third is a rice mill, a fourth is an oil mill and a fifth is a sugar company. 38 out of the rest come under the category of “Other Trading and Manufacturing”—which, as the name implies, has very little to do with manufacture—leaving only 10 (Engineering 4, Public Service 1, Building Materials 5). (*State Manual Vol. III*, p. 667)

The statistics of joint stock companies given in the administration Report for the year 1119 (1943-44) shows that, out of the 436 companies registered in Travancore with a total paid-up capital of Rs. 502 lakhs, 138 companies with a total paid-up capital of Rs. 63 lakhs are engaged in moneylending, 18 companies with Rs. 7 lakhs in transport, 89 companies with Rs. 282 lakhs in plantations. This means that 56.1 per cent of the companies with 70.1 per cent of the paid-up capital are engaged in those lines of production that have got nothing to do with industries. The balance of 30 per cent of the paid-up capital of joint stock companies is devoted to all those trading and manufacturing operations that are being carried on. It will thus be clear that only a very small percentage of the total capital of joint stock companies is used for industrial production.

Another aspect of a colonial economy is also evident from the Administration Report—a major part of the country's economy is controlled by the foreigners, mainly British. For example, there are 21 plantation companies registered outside India and functioning in Travancore, the total paid-up capital of which is Rs. 7,70,22,558; while there are 89 companies registered in Travancore with a paid-up capital of Rs. 2,82,00,000. 73.3 per cent of the total paid-up capital of plantation companies is thus foreign, mainly British. Similarly, according to the Depression Committee, out of a total area of land under plantation crops of 1,84,604 acres, 31,000 acres alone are held by local planters, thus leaving 5/6 of the total plantation

acreage under the British. British capitalists also control 60 per cent of the coir industry in Travancore. As a matter of fact, it will not be an exaggeration to say that it is a few British firms like Pierce Leslie & Co., Harrison & Crossfields, Kannan Devan, Commonwealth Trust etc., and the Swiss Volkart Brothers which dominate the plantation and such other industries as have developed in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar.

## (4)

This colonial character of the economy as a whole—the very low development of industries proper as well as the domination of British capital in all those fields of activity that can be called capitalistic—leaves the indigenous bourgeoisie no other field for the investment of capital than land. All those who are able to make savings are forced to invest them in loans to peasants or landlords, in the acquisition of rights on land mortgages or even in land purchase. This in its turn has led to a gigantic transformation in the character of landed property itself; i.e., it has become a commodity that can be bought and sold like any other commodity.

According to the *Travancore State Manual*, the total value of cultivated land in Travancore (21,97,000 acres) is Rs. 140,99 lakhs. At the same time, land transfers took place at the following rates in the following periods:

Period	Value of land sold	Value of land mortgaged	Value of land Hypotheccated	Total
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1917-18 to 1919-20	193 lakhs	144 lakhs	218 lakhs	555 lakhs
1920-21 to 1924-25	221 lakhs	164 lakhs	234 lakhs	619 lakhs
1925-26 to 1930-31	303 lakhs	153 lakhs	298 lakhs	754 lakhs
1931-32 to 1933-34	172 lakhs	103 lakhs	192 lakhs	467 lakhs
<b>Total</b>	<b>889 lakhs</b>	<b>564 lakhs</b>	<b>942 lakhs</b>	<b>2,395 lakhs</b>

This means that, for the 16-year period as a whole, land transfers per year averaged about Rs. 149.9 lakhs. In other words, more than 1 per cent of the total cultivated land

(whose value, as stated above, is Rs. 140,99 lakhs) is changing hands every year.

Similarly, in Cochin (whose total cultivated land is 5,09,564 acres) sale of land alone (i.e. excluding mortgages and hypothecations) was valued at an average of 7,351 acres valued at Rs. 35.4 lakhs per year in the war years of 1942-46. (Sivaswamy Committee Report)

It is also remarkable that the argument advanced in the majority report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee in 1940 against reducing the rate of rent from 2½ to 1½ was that such a reduction would not enable the landlord to get a reasonable return on his investment at the prevailing rates in the land market.

All this shows that the sale and purchase of land has become as regular a process as the sale and purchase of any other commodity.

It has also led to the imposition of a new burden on the peasantry—the burden of indebtedness.

According to the figures collected for the Banking Committee of 1951, the total agrarian indebtedness of Travancore is Rs. 20 to 25 crores. This would mean that a minimum of Rs. 3 crores (being calculated at 15 per cent on Rs. 20 crores) goes every year to the moneylender as interest; this out of a total value of agricultural produce of Rs. 10½ crores works out to 1/3 of the gross agricultural produce. In reality, however, it is far more than this, since the rate of 15 per cent of interest is an under-estimate rather than an over-estimate.

No such figures are available for either Cochin or Malabar. But it was calculated in one of the Minutes of Dissent to the 1940 Malabar Tenancy Committee's Report, that the agrarian indebtedness of Malabar would be about Rs. 15 crores. Interest on this at 15 per cent will amount to Rs. 2½ crores. This works out to more than 25 per cent of the value of a year's agricultural produce (Rs. 7 crores).

The 1936 Survey into the conditions of some villages in Cochin showed that the total value of land in 7 villages (at market rates) was Rs. 40,59,704 while the debts secured on those lands alone (i. e. excluding loans borrowed by peasants on documents with no security on lands) came to Rs. 8,00,903. In other words, 20 per cent of the total value of land in these villages is the liability of these lands to the moneylender.

All these figures lead us to a reasonable assumption that no less than 30 per cent of a year's agricultural produce is

the tribute levied by the usurer on the land. Part of it may be drawn from the share which the landlord collects by way of rent and may not therefore be a direct burden on the cultivator, but part is certainly an additional burden (over and above the landlord's rent) on the peasant. It is significant that, in Travancore where the share of the landlord is comparatively less, almost five times the amount collected by the landlord is collected by the moneylender (rent is Rs. 117 lakhs, interest is over Rs. 3 crores).

## (5)

An extremely significant development that took place in the period of British rule was the transformation of the jenmis from a real ruling class to a class of rent receivers—parasites in every sense of the term.

We have seen in an earlier chapter that the jenmis of pre-British days were an organic part of the then prevailing socio-political set-up. The state machinery of those days was based on the social order whose foundation lay in the ownership, as proprietor, of certain patches of land—each of the Rajas, Desavazhis, Naduvazhis, etc., having his own lands, a fixed share of the produce of which was paid as his share. It was because of this system of payment in kind in the form of a share of the agricultural produce that Kerala upto the period of Tippu Sultan had not heard of the custom of the government levying land revenue.

A peculiarity of this system was that nobody was a proprietor of land in the modern sense of the term, i.e., nobody could do with the land as he pleased. There was a regular code of relations as between the jenmi, the kanamdar, the verumpatamdar, etc. This code of relations did of course give very wide power to the jenmi who could interfere with the personal and domestic affairs of all his tenants. The jenmi however had no right to evict any of his tenants, so long as they paid the jenmi's share of the produce and otherwise obeyed him. Nor would any jenmi dream of increasing the rent due to him, as enhancement of rent would not be countenanced by society. Hence, while the tenants were very much under the feudal domination of the jenmi, the degree of economic exploitation to which they were subjected was extremely limited.

It was to this system that the British rulers dealt a heavy blow. In the name of restoring order in the land, they did two things :

1) They made the land revenue, first imposed by Tippu Sultan, a permanent institution, every square-inch of land being subjected to it. How heavy this burden is can be seen from the fact that while the rate of land revenue in Malabar and Cochin varies today and varied in Travancore till recently from Re. 1 or so to Rs. 9 per acre, the average rate of rent collected by zamindars in permanently settled Bengal is only Rs. 3-8 and that in U.P. Rs. 5-8. The government's revenue demands here are, in other words, as heavy as those of the zamindar's for rent.

2) They so interpreted the system of landlord-tenant relations in Kerala that, in the brief period of a couple of decades, the jenmis were transformed into absolute masters of the land. The customary limitations put on the jenmi were disregarded and he was permitted to evict his tenants as well as enhance his rents as and when he pleased. Efforts were, of course, subsequently made to partially retrieve the situation by means of tenancy legislations but these did not arrest the process of pauperisation of the peasants. For, whatever was achieved through these tenancy legislations benefited only a small stratum of well-to-do (very often non-cultivating) tenants, thus leaving the large mass of cultivating tenants and sub-tenants.

According to the figures collected by the Malabar Tenancy Committee (1940), 90 per cent of the total cultivated land is owned by non-cultivators and leased out to cultivators. Basing himself on the figures collected by the Committee and calculating on the basis of rates fixed under the provisions of the Tenancy Act in force, one of the members of the Committee in his Minute of Dissent showed that, out of a total of Rs. 700 lakhs worth of a year's agricultural produce, Rs. 250 lakhs go to landlords and Rs. 50 lakhs to Government. Slightly less than 50 per cent of the total produce is thus taken out of the hands of the peasants. It should however be borne in mind that this calculation is made on the basis of rates fixed in the Tenancy Act which are less than the real rates prevailing

at the time. This figure should therefore be considered an under-estimate rather than an over-estimate.

For Cochin as a whole, there are no such figures. But the officer who conducted an Economic Survey of some typical villages in 1936 recorded in every case that, after meeting the cultivation expenses and paying the rent to the landlord, the tenant-cultivator gets absolutely nothing; in many cases he may even run into debt. This was also the report of the officer who investigated on behalf of the Cochin Agrarian Committee of 1948. He said that the proportion of rent fixed generally ranges from one half to three-fourths of the yield while cost of cultivation is about 50 per cent. To the question as to how 50 per cent to 75 per cent of the yield can be collected as rent if the cost of cultivation itself is 50 per cent, this officer answers: 50 per cent as cost of cultivation includes all the items that are part of a scientifically-calculated cost of cultivation (such as seed, manure, wages for hired as well as family labour, fodder for the whole year, interest on and depreciation of capital invested in cattle and implements etc.), while the ordinary peasant includes only seed, wages for hired labour and fodder for the period of agricultural operations. Rent is thus "not only a deduction from the profit but also from elements required for the reproduction of capital." (Marx)

The real position however is far worse than this, as is shown by the figures collected by the Cochin Kisan Sabha (See Table on page 86).

Similarly figures were also collected from two more villages by the Kisan Sabha and submitted to the Agrarian Committee of 1948.

So far as Travancore is concerned, the non-cultivating, rent-receiving landlords collect 11.7 per cent of the total agricultural produce as rent. For, according to the 1931 Economic Census, the total value of a year's agricultural produce is Rs. 10,50 lakhs, out of which Rs. 117 lakhs goes as rent to landlords. It is also remarkable that, while this Rs. 117 lakhs is appropriated by 17.99 per cent landlords, Rs. 161 lakhs goes to 223,689 agricultural labourers as wages and Rs. 713 lakhs to 355,635 owner-cultivators and cultivating tenants. The respective share per capita of landlords' rent, labourers' wages and cultivators' income are thus Rs. 650, Rs. 70 and Rs. 202.

While therefore, the British system of administration made the old militarist-feudal political order defunct and superfluous, while the functions of the Rajas, the Naduvazhis, the Desavaz-

## RENT RATES IN PANTALUR VILLAGE

(Names are here omitted. They are given in the original).

No.	Gross produce. Paras of paddy	Rent. Paras of paddy	% of rent to gross produce	Indebtedness
1.	100	90	90	500
2.	250	213	85	200
3.	120	100	86	300
4.	180	168	90	300
5.	350	240	70	3000
6.	400	308	75	400
7.	400	357	80	—
8.	200	148	75	300
9.	240	156	65	435
10.	420	281	62	—
11.	80	56	70	1000
12.	40	28	70	2500
13.	160	150	94	400
14.	240	192	80	125
15.	100	60	60	200
16.	75	54	70	250
17.	720	428	60	—
18.	50	32	67	—
19.	90	60	67	125
20.	88	69	80	300
21.	130	105	90	—
22.	108	96	90	500
23.	75	66	90	35
24.	64	54	84	200

his, etc. were entirely taken over by British civilians, the shares of the produce which these incumbents to administrative offices were receiving in return for the services rendered by them, were greatly increased. They thus became real parasites in the full sense of the term. They however were parasites only in relation to the people of Kerala and not in relation to the British rulers for whom they rendered distinguished service. For, it was through these loyal supporters of their rule that the British could squeeze the last pie from the hands of the peasants; it was through this continuous exploitation of the peasantry that they could be forced to produce such raw materials as imperialism required; it was through this exploitation and the consequent pauperisation of the rural population that imperialism could get cheap labour for its plantations and mines in all parts of the world as well as cannon fodder in times of war. The proud successors of the Cheras and the Perumals had thus become loyal and obedient agents of an alien rule whose existence is the only reason for their own survival.

## (6)

All these transformations in the socio-economic order have led to a steady and continuous pauperisation of our people.

The 150 years of British rule were years in which, first the poor peasant, then the middle peasant, then again the rich peasant and sections of the landlords lost their proprietary rights on the land and had to leave their country in search of jobs in all parts of India as well as in such foreign lands as Burma, Malaya, Ceylon, etc. A good chunk of the Indian labourers in Ceylon, Burma and Malaya are drawn from among the Malayalees; so do a good chunk of the Malayalee middle class go out as clerks all over India and the industrial proletariat of Coimbatore, Madras, Bombay etc., also contain their own quota of Malayalees. It will not be an exaggeration to say that, for every 12 Malayalees living in Kerala, one is an emigrant in various parts of India and the rest of the world.

While this process was originally confined to the peasant and other toiling classes, the years of the First World War have also brought several families of big landlords into it. The inflation of the First World War and the immediate post-

war years put a tremendous amount of money in the hands of these big landlords and they used it for lending to medium and small landlords or for buying their lands outright. Since however there was not sufficient money in their hands to buy all that was available, many of these landlords borrowed a good portion of their requirements at rates of interest that paid in those days of high prices of agricultural commodities. The crash of 1929 shattered all their hopes of making a profit on borrowed capital; not only did the land, bought with borrowed capital, fail to yield any profits but interest on borrowed capital began to eat up the rent on lands traditionally owned by them and passed from generation to generation. The process of family budgets getting unbalanced, depending on the usurer not only to pay off past debts, but to meet current expenses as well, mortgaging of land, being forced to sell land, getting insolvent etc. started in the case of big feudal landlords also. The result is that today in the ranks of the emigrant Malayalees seeking jobs outside can be found members of the old feudal landlord families.

Out of this pauperisation of the people, i.e., the pauperisation of the entire peasantry as well as sections of the landlords, has arisen a class of landlords of a new type. These landlords of the new type do not base themselves on the right of "ancient jenmam", since they are not in continuous possession of jenmam rights on their lands, as the landlords of the old type were. They, on the other hand, lay their claim to their lands on the fact that they paid cash to get these rights. This being so, they are also far more stringent than the landlords of the old type in the matter of squeezing rent from their tenants: they would not be satisfied, as the old type of landlords would be, with nominal rents combined with social subservience but would insist on the last pie being paid to them. Many of the old type landlord families have themselves become new type landlords by buying lands and managing them as property on which they have invested their cash for which they insist on as big a return as possible. It is in this way that, while the entire peasantry and sections of the landlords themselves have become pauperised, a section of the old landlords themselves as well as sections of the newly-rich people have become landlords who have a monopoly of possession of land.

This polarisation as between the pauperised majority and the extremely rich minority can be seen in the figures of

families (percentage in the total number of families) classified according to annual family net income in 7 typical villages of Cochin, collected by the Economic Survey Officer in 1936 :

Village	Below Rs. 25	Rs. 26 to 50	Rs. 51 to 100	Rs. 101 to 200	Rs. 201 to 500	Rs. 501 to 1000	Rs. 1001 to 2000	Above Rs. 2000
Antikad	3.8	9.0	35.5	33.3	10.5	1.5	1.1	0.5
Chundal	1.6	9.3	33.9	38.9	12.4	1.2	0.8	0.3
Eruttompadi	2.0	7.3	30.2	39.5	12.7	2.6	0.8	0.6
Pattancheri	0.9	6.1	37.2	41.8	10.8	1.7	0.3	0.1
Venganallur	1.1	10.4	38.7	35.5	11.5	2.0	0.2	—
Vallivattam	1.7	5.9	31.3	46.7	9.8	0.3	0.1	—
Tiruvaliyad	1.0	7.0	35.6	44.2	9.0	1.3	0.4	—

(Difference in all cases between 100 and the total of above figures is accounted for by families with "minus net income").

This shows that :

1. Between 38.9 per cent (in Vallivattam) and 50.2 per cent (Venganallur) of families fall in the category of those below Rs. 100 per year per family, or less than Rs. 20 per head per year, or less than 1 anna per head per day.
2. Between 79 per cent (Eruttompadi) and 87.8 per cent (Tiruvaliyad) of families fall in the category of those below Rs. 200 per family per year, or less than Rs. 40 per head per year, or less than 2 annas per head per day.
3. Only a microscopic minority of between 0.4 per cent (Vallivattam) and 5 per cent (Antikad) falls in the category of those with Rs. 500 and above per family per year, or Rs. 100 and above per head per year, or above 4½ annas per head per day.

The following is the classification of the 100,059 families

surveyed in Travancore in 1941 according to annual net income per family. (These figures include not only rural areas but also urban areas. It is clear that if the figures relating to urban areas are deducted from these, poverty will be shown to be more intense than is seen here).

Income Group	No. of Families	Percentage
Below Rs. 60 per year	20,199	20.2
Between Rs. 61 and Rs. 120	38,992	39.0
Between Rs. 121 and Rs. 180	18,075	18.0
Between Rs. 181 and Rs. 300	12,886	12.9
Between Rs. 301 and Rs. 480	5,254	5.3
Between Rs. 481 and Rs. 840	2,695	2.7
Between Rs. 841 and Rs. 1,200	787	0.8
Between Rs. 1,201 and Rs. 1,800	558	0.6
Between Rs. 1,801 and Rs. 2,400	251	0.3
Between Rs. 2,401 and Rs. 3,600	183	0.2
Between Rs. 3,601 and Rs. 4,800	66	}
Between Rs. 4,801 and Rs. 6,000	40	0.2
Between Rs. 6,001 and Rs. 8,400	23	
Above Rs. 8,400	52	

Thus :

1. 59.2 per cent of families have less than Rs. 120 per year.
2. 77.2 per cent have less than Rs. 180 per year.
3. 90.1 per cent have less than Rs. 300 per year.
4. Only a small minority of 4.6 per cent have annual incomes of above Rs. 481 per year.

So much with regard to the annual income of families. Now, let us look at it from another angle — the angle of landholdings.

The 100,059 families in Travancore mentioned above can be classified as follows, according to the area of land they own:

Category	Number	Percentage
No land	40,795	40.8
Below Rs. 500 worth (about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre) of land	36,969	37.0
Rs. 500-1,000 worth ( $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 acre) of land	8,985	9.0
Rs. 1,000-4,000 worth (1 to 4 acres) of land	9,601	9.6
Above Rs. 4,000 worth (4 acres) of land	3,709	3.7
Total	100,059	

Thus,

1. Those with absolutely no land or very little (less than 1 acre) land constitute 86.8 per cent of the total.
2. Those who have land above 4 acres constitute only 3.7 per cent.

It should also be noted that :

1. Families with less than Rs. 60 as annual income and less than Rs. 500 worth ( $\frac{1}{2}$  acre) of land are 20,199.
2. Those with less than Rs. 120 annual income and less than Rs. 500 worth ( $\frac{1}{2}$  acre) of land are 55,012.
3. Those with less than Rs. 300 annual income and less than Rs. 1,000 worth (1 acre) of land are 83,259.
4. Those with annual income of above Rs. 300 and land worth above Rs. 4,000 (4 acres) are only 3,211.

As regards Cochin, the 7 villages mentioned above have the following classification of peasants and their percentages:

Village	Below 25 cents	26-50 cents	51 cents to 1 acre	1 to 5 acres	Above 5 acres
Antikad	12.5	12.5	17.7	39.1	18.2
Chundal	20.2	14.4	13.7	32.8	18.9
Eruttompadi	27.8	4.0	2.9	8.1	57.2
Pattancheri	7.9	7.9	17.1	26.3	40.8
Venganallur	21.5	20.5	18.1	22.0	18.1
Vallivattam	10.5	16.5	20.2	41.4	11.4
Tiruvaliyad	42.1	3.5	7.0	15.8	31.6

These figures of classification of peasants will be incomplete if we forget the figures of percentage of landowning (both landlord and tenant) families to total number of families which, in the 7 villages, are respectively, 43.1, 54.4, 30.2, 17.2, 40.3, 43.5 and 16.6. Combining these two sets of figures, we find that :

1. 39.1 per cent, 38.7 per cent, 59.3 per cent, 64.4 per cent, 54.7 per cent, 41.7 per cent and 72.9 per cent of families belong to the category of absolutely landless peasants.
2. Again, out of every 100 families in the above villages, those who have land less than 1 acre constitute 18.5 per cent, 25.9 per cent, 10.5 per cent, 5.6 per cent, 24.0 per cent, 20.7 per cent and 8.3 per cent respectively.
3. Moreover, those with land between 1 acre and 5 acres constitute 16.8 per cent, 17.3 per cent, 2.4 per cent, 4.4 per cent, 8.8 per cent, 17.6 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively; and
4. Those with land above 5 acres constitute only 7.7 per cent, 9.7 per cent, 17.1 per cent, 7 per cent, 7.2 per cent, 4.8 per cent and 5.3 per cent respectively.

It is thus clear that whether you take annual net income per family or the land they own as the criterion of classification, 60 to 80 per cent of the rural population in Cochin and Travancore is proletarian and semi-proletarian. This is the result of the combined exploitation of imperialism, feudal and semi-feudal landlordism and usury.

As against this proletarian and semi-proletarian majority is the small minority of big landlords and other upper class exploiters of this majority.

According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, while 20,199 families out of 100,059 have annual incomes below Rs. 60 and another 38,992 have incomes between Rs. 60 and Rs. 120 (these together may certainly be considered as proletarian), only a very small minority of 1,173 families (1.17 per cent) have incomes above Rs. 1,200 a year. These 1,173 families are classified as follows as per their occupation or means of livelihood:

- (1) Landlords: 325 (27.7 per cent of this income group; 0.325 per cent of total population);

(2) Trade and industry (including Banking): 301 (25.7 per cent of this income group; 0.301 per cent of the total population);

(3) Government service and professions: 520 (44.3 per cent of this income group; 0.52 per cent of total population);

(4) Others: 27 (2.5 per cent of this income group; 0.027 per cent of total population).

It is on this thin top stratum of exploiters that the British rulers rely to carry on their rule. It is from their ranks that high Government officials as well as the non-official "professional" classes are drawn. It is with their assistance, as we will see in subsequent chapters, that the British rulers crushed, disrupted or sabotaged the democratic movement of the common, toiling people. For, although it was itself the victim of imperialistic oppression and exploitation, this top stratum of exploiters was too hostile to the interests of the common people to identify itself with the anti-imperialist movement of the entire people; like the rajas, naduvazhis, desavazhis, etc. of the 18th century, their successors of the 20th century—the present-day jenmi, trader, industrial and professional classes—would far rather yield to the blandishments of their imperialist oppressors than unite with the common people to overthrow imperialist domination.

## *Chapter VII*

### PEASANTS IN ANTI-IMPERIALIST ACTION

(1)

"We thought", said Minister (Dalava) Velu Thampi, the leader of the anti-British revolt in Travancore, in his famous Kundara Proclamation of 1809, "that the (English East India) Company is composed of people of integrity and loyalty to allies and that they would not cheat us. We therefore permitted them to erect a fort at Anjengo and settle themselves there. Believing in their loyalty and friendship, we fought Tippu Sultan and made alliance with them. Subsequently, however, it was proved that friendship with them was a source of danger to us."

Recounting how the demands of the Company on the State of Travancore rose from time to time and how the Company sent its troops to enforce these demands, Velu Thampi concluded: "If resistance is not offered at this stage to what they are attempting to do, our people will be put to such sufferings as cannot be borne by human beings. If they are allowed to use their traditional methods of trickery to bring our country into their hands, they will put their sentries over, and control, every place including the palace; stop all the traditional honour to our ruler as well as the traditional usages of temples and Brahmin houses; bring every article including salt into their monopoly; measure every plot of land and every house-site and levy excessive land tax, cocoanut tax etc., inflict barbarous punishments for slight offences; put the Christian Cross and their flag on temples; violate the chastity of Brahmin ladies; and introduce all other customs that are contrary to our religion. In order that such misfortunes may not occur in our country, that the royal Dharma may be preserved, that our country's traditional way of life is saved from destruction, we should do all that is humanly possible and leave the rest to the will of God. Thus have we started our resistance to the Company."

The author of the *Travancore State Manual* says regarding this proclamation: "Velu Thampi stated his case in such forcible language that the whole country seethed with a spirit of uncompromising hostility towards those who were described as enemies to the country....The country rose as one man to fight its battles to the utmost of its resources. Armed men came in thousands upon thousands to join Velu Thampi's standard. The Travancore army consisted of more than 30,000 men with 18 guns."

Velu Thampi however was not alone in this. The issue on which he raised the standard of revolt was such that the entire people of Travancore, including the ruling class, was behind him; those of them who hesitated to join did so only because they were afraid that the British were too powerful for any revolt to succeed. Furthermore, "the affairs of Cochin favoured a combination of the two states against Col. Macaulay. The Raja of Cochin was a weak prince who was content to live a quiet life at Vellarapalli while he allowed the minister Paliyath Achan to administer the state as he liked. Both states presented the same spectacle in their administrations ....Both ministers (Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan) who were already united in private friendship with each other were stirred by a common motive against Macaulay who, they believed, was not only their personal foe but also a dangerous enemy to both countries." (*Travancore State Manual*)

Thus was begun the first national revolt against the British—a revolt which, in all essentials, resembles the subsequent and far bigger revolt in another part of the country—the famous 'Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857. Persistent efforts have been made by British historians to paint Velu Thampi as a traitor and intriguer; efforts have also been made by Indian authors to paint the picture of an honest and patriotic man who tried to be friendly, but who was ultimately forced to clash with the British rulers because of the particularly offensive tactics of the then British Resident, Col. Macaulay. Actually, however, Velu Thampi and, to a lesser extent, Paliyath Achan represented the feudal ruling class of our country who were incensed at the humility they had to suffer at the hands of the alien rulers and hence decided to offer a last-ditch battle.

It is this same resistance of the feudal ruling classes to British rule that we find in the struggle which the Raja of Payassi in North Malabar offered to the British in the jungly regions of present-day Kottayam and Wynad Taluks. The

prolonged engagements in which the world-renowned Duke of Wellington was bogged down against this Raja (of Payassi) and his Kurichiars is one of the most colourful stories of heroism in our country's annals.

It is true that these representatives of our ruling class, as their counterparts of 1857, were originally loyal to the British rulers; it was through the loyal assistance rendered by them that the British strengthened themselves. But, once they found in real life that in return for their services, the British made them absolutely subservient, their sense of honour asserted itself and they unfurled the banner of revolt. In this revolt against the alien rulers, they represented not only their own narrow class interests but the interests of the whole nation; for, as Velu Thampi made clear in his Kun-dara Proclamation, he was defending against the British not only the privileges of his master, the Raja of Travancore, but also the land, the articles of daily use, the social and religious practices, of the entire people—all of which were threatened by the British. And it is this national character of their revolt that made them leaders of a movement in which prince was united with the peasant and in which the soldier was not a mercenary but a real defender of the people's hearths and homes.

These revolts, however, proved futile since the enemy was too powerful for the people. Not only were the British military forces far superior but they were able politically to divide and disrupt the ranks of the rebels. A section of those who raised the banner of revolt was, from the very beginning, vacillating; e.g. Paliyath Achan who joined Velu Thampi first, subsequently made peace with the enemy. Furthermore, there were very powerful sections of the ruling class which stoutly opposed the revolt. These political weaknesses on the part of the rebels were intensified as they had to suffer military reverses and heavy casualties. Col. Macaulay could therefore very easily and quickly inflict total defeat on Velu Thampi who, to save himself from the humiliation of surrender, killed himself. Col. Macaulay wreaked his vengeance on the rebels by heaping unspeakable atrocities on them—atrocities which were too much even for the Government of India which condemned Macaulay's conduct.

The rebellion of the Raja of Payassi did of course take a longer time to quell than that of Velu Thampi because of the terrain of Kottayam-Wynad Taluks which are ideally suited

for the tactics of guerilla warfare. But that too was ultimately crushed as heroism, even when combined with favourable terrain, was inadequate to meet an enemy militarily far superior.

## (2)

With this came to an end the national revolt against Britain, so far as the erstwhile ruling, feudal class is concerned; the descendants of the rajas, naduvazhis, desavazhis, etc., found that the new power that rose on the ashes of the social order of which their predecessors were the guardians, was too strong for them; what is more, the new power was such that, if only they were prepared to submit to its domination, they stood to lose nothing and to gain everything out of its stabilisation. We therefore find that after the suppression of Velu Thampi's and Payassi Raja's revolts the feudal classes as a whole became the loyal supporters of British rule.

This however was not the case with the peasants and the common people who had magnificently rallied under the banner of revolt unfurled by Velu Thampi and Payassi Raja. For, as we have seen in the last chapter, their daily lives went on becoming worse and still worse as each day rolled by; anti-imperialism was not for them, as it was for the feudal classes, a mere national sentiment but a question of daily life. It is true that, being oppressed and unenlightened, they could not organise a successful struggle against the main enemy, or even see the real enemy, i.e., imperialism. Nevertheless, they are the people who suffer, daily and hourly, from the concrete results of the operations of the enemy and hence are acutely conscious of the necessity for the practical struggle against the concrete manifestations of the feudal-colonial economy set up by the British rulers. It was in this way that spontaneous peasant actions started developing in Malabar.

It was in 1809 that Velu Thampi's revolt was suppressed; and about the same time Payassi Raja was caught by the British. Within quarter of a century of the suppression of these revolts broke out the first of the series of peasant revolts commonly known as Moplah outbreaks (the first of these took place in 1836). The British rulers tried at first to suppress these outbreaks by employing the same tactics of terror as were found useful in suppressing the national revolt led by

the erstwhile ruling feudal class; they banished one of the leaders of the Moplah community (Syed Fazal Pookkoya Thangal) from India (1852) and enacted what is called the Moplah Outrages Act. On the theory that Muslims as a community are anti-British and should, as such, be suppressed, the British followed a policy of suppressing the Moplahs. But, when they found that this policy did not yield the desired result but that outbreak after outbreak was taking place, they decided in the year 1870 to make proper investigations into the root cause of these disturbances. And the officer who was appointed to make this investigation (Mr. Logan) reported that indiscriminate evictions and enhancements of rent on the part of the jenmis lay at the root of these disturbances.

The same development was taking place in Travancore, though not in the form of Moplah riots. For, there too, as the *Travancore State Manual* says, "the monopoly in land and a sense of insecurity on account of the jenmi's right of eviction became causes of complaint by the cultivating peasants. The steady increase of population and the absence of any other profession except agriculture led to more and more persons becoming dependent on land for their subsistence. The jenmis having no source of income except their lands were compelled to exact as much as they could from their tenants and this only increased their discontent. The great demand for cultivable lands helped the jenmi to let his lands to the highest bidder. .... The increase in the value of land gave the jenmis their opportunity. They began to demand from their tenants larger sums as advances and larger rents. If a tenant failed to comply with the jenmi's demand, he was promptly turned out of his holding. This led to serious discontent among the agricultural classes and complaints were made to the Government." (Vol. III, p. 161) It was to allay this discontent, adds the *State Manual*, that the Maharaja of Travancore, in a communication to the Appeal Court, directed that, in respect of all suits for eviction, the courts should see that the jenmis receive their dues and allow the tenants to remain in possession and enjoyment of their property.

It was thus that the first anti-feudal mass movement in our country began to take shape—the movement for tenancy reform. The demand was raised that the jenmi's right of eviction should be curtailed and that he should not be allowed to take excessive rents from tenants. Committee after committee studied the problem, drafted bills, made recommendations etc.,

with a view to solving the problem of land relations in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Tenants' associations were organised, deputations led, meetings held and other forms of agitation resorted to by the well-to-do peasants (mostly kanamdars) from whose ranks are drawn the professionals and Government officials.

It is true that this was not a mass movement in the full sense of the term, since its demands were confined to those that affect the kanamdars; the large mass of peasants, the verumpattamdars, were kept out of the purview of the movement. It was however a mass movement in a general way, since the target of attack by the agitators, the jenmi, was the common oppressor of the entire peasantry. The leaders of the movement did of course subsequently (after 1930) join hands with the jenmis against the mass of peasantry but they did the preliminary job of making the struggle against the jenmi a national and popular movement. Hence, though the organised peasant movement of the last decade and a half has had to contend with the treachery of the original leaders of the Tenancy Movement and evolve a new leadership, there is no doubt that it was the Tenancy Movement that gave our peasants the first elements of class consciousness, the consciousness that they should unite as a class and fight their enemy, the jenmi.

### (3)

Having far more of a mass character than the Tenancy Movement but far less clear in regard to its class content was the movement of the oppressed and untouchable castes for social equality. It was towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries that the Nayars and the Ezhavas began to organise themselves into their caste associations, the Nayar Service Society and the S. N. D. P. Yogam. The circumstances under which they were organised are described by one author as follows :

"It was on Edavam 2, 1078, Malayalam era (May 16, 1903) that the S. N. D. P. Yogam was registered. The origin of the Yogam is a confluence of two streams, one spiritual, the other political.

"In the year 1067 Malayalam Era (1891-92 A.D.), over 10,000 people signed and submitted the famous Malaya-

lee Memorial to the Maharajah of Travancore in which it was demanded that the political rights of the Malayalees should be protected against the attacks of outsiders. That Memorial sharply accused the Government of having refused admission to Ezhavas in Government schools and doing nothing to safeguard their rights. The reply of the Government to this Memorial said that Ezhavas were quite satisfied with their traditional occupations like agriculture, toddy tapping, coir-making, etc.; that they were not interested in higher education or Government service; and that political agitators had just included them among the signatories to the Memorial in order to increase their numerical strength.

"As a matter of fact, however, one of the organisers of the Malayalee Memorial was Dr. Palpu who had secured his L.M.S. diploma but could get no job in Travancore and hence had to seek refuge in the Mysore service. Long before the Malayalee Memorial, Dr. Palpu had been carrying on agitation by way of Memorials to the Government as well as through newspaper articles, demanding that Ezhavas should get at least those rights which they would get if they become Christians. Finding this agitation to have borne no fruit, he organised the Travancore Ezhava Sabha in order to carry on organised agitation. This organisation had, in September 1896, organised the submission of a Memorial to the Maharajah with over 13,000 signatures and seeking the redress of their grievances. Since this too proved of no avail, the Ezhavas of Travancore were in a demoralised state.

"It was at this time that Swami Vivekanand had returned from America and started his all-India tour with a view to the restoration of Hindu religion in all its glory. The representative of this new movement in Kerala, Sri Narayan Guruswamy, established a temple at Aruvipuram and, in 1074 Malayalam Era (1898-99 A.D.), registered a Yogam (Association) to carry on the affairs of the temple. The Swami and Dr. Palpu being old friends, the spiritual brilliance of the Swami was now combined with the militant spirit of social service of the Doctor, so that the organisations that functioned under their joint leadership became efficient. On Dhanu 23, 1078 Malayalam Era (January 5, 1903 A.D.), a special session of the Yogam was held at which it was decided to transform

the Yogam into the Sri Narayan Dharma Paripalana (S.N.D.P.) Yogam with the aims and objects of developing the spiritual and secular education, and helping the economic advancement, of the Ezhavas.

"In the meanwhile, Kumaran Asan had come back from Calcutta after his education in Sanskrit. The combination of the holy Swami, the efficient organiser Dr. Palpu and the hard-working Asan, made the Yogam well-known throughout Kerala; its annual sessions were held at Aruvipuram, Quilon, Alleppey, Trivandrum (all in Travancore), Ernakulam (Cochin), Cannanore and Calicut (Malabar). Along with the annual sessions held at Quilon and Cannanore, large-scale exhibitions were also organised. Apart from rousing the social consciousness of the Ezhava masses in and around the various venues of these conferences, these sessions also served to demonstrate the united force of, and create a sense of solidarity in the Ezhava masses from the Cape in the South to the borders of Karnatak in the North."

Now, the Ezhavas are a community which is numerically the strongest, and socially and culturally the most advanced, among the non-caste Hindus. Suffering as they do various inequalities of a non-caste Hindu community, including untouchability, they became the champions of the struggle against untouchability and other forms of social inequality. Being socially and culturally more advanced than the Scheduled Castes, they could, more easily than the latter, create those forms of agitation and organisation which would prove useful in the struggle for social equality. They, therefore, became the main source of inspiration to, and the virtual leaders of, all the oppressed and untouchable castes. It was natural, therefore, that the formation of the S. N. D. P. Yogam was followed by the formation of the caste organisations of the various untouchable castes.

This tendency to form caste organisations was, however, not confined to the Ezhavas and the untouchables. In fact at the same time when the Swami, the Doctor and Asan were organising the Ezhavas in their S. N. D. P. Yogam, there were some leaders of the Nayar community also who were forming their caste organisations. Now, it is true that the Nayars are one of the privileged castes; but they too suffered various inequalities in relation to castes that are above them,

e.g. the Namboodiris. Furthermore, they had various social problems relating to marriage, family, inheritance, etc., which, in the eyes of the enlightened representatives of the community were far too outmoded and required radical transformation. It was thus that the various caste organisations were formed all over Kerala, though they could not be centralised under such a dynamic personality as Sri Narayan Guru of the Ezhavas.

The tendency to form caste organisations ultimately reached the highest caste, the Namboodiris. It is true that they are the most privileged in the social order. But, for the same reason, their system of the family, marriage and inheritance was as outmoded as that of any other caste. It, therefore, raised various problems the solution of which was considered by the enlightened representatives of the community as necessary for their advancement. It was thus that they too formed their own caste organisation.

Though it is thus clear that almost all castes were organising themselves in their respective caste organisations, the most significant of these organisations were those of the oppressed and untouchable castes, because it was these caste organisations that were, for the first time in the history of Kerala, mobilising the overwhelming majority of the peasantry against the prevailing social order which was oppressive to the entire people of Kerala. It was in fact the formation of the caste organisations of these sections of the people that, together with the tenancy movement as explained above, laid the first basis for the rising peasant movement.

It is easy enough to see today that these caste organisations are not the class organisations of the peasantry; they do, on the contrary, consolidate the caste separatism of the people in general and the peasantry in particular, so that the grip of these caste organisations on the peasantry has to be broken if they are to be organised as a class. It is, however, a historical fact that the first form in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism was the form of caste organisations. In spite of the fact that they had no clear perspective of changing the social order, of breaking the backs of landlords as a class, of ending the rent system and redistributing land, the Nayar peasantry rose against the Brahmin jenmis and the Ezhava peasantry against their caste-Hindu oppressors including the Nayars. It was this peasant character of the caste

organisations that made them part and parcel of the national politics of our country.

It has become fashionable for those who consider themselves nationalists to denounce these caste organisations as anti-national and reactionary because they sought the help of the British imperialists in getting their grievances redressed. They however forget the main point, which is not that they had the same illusions as to the progressive-democratic character of the British as the pre-Tilak generation of nationalists had, but that, in spite of these illusions, they roused and organised the masses against some aspects of the oppressive social order. The Nayars and Ezhava peasants who were first roused against caste oppression and for a fairer and juster social order were sure in course of time to advance further along the road of struggle. When they did this they could not but break the chain of pro-imperialist illusions that bound them in the first phase of their organisation and struggle.

We will see in the next two chapters that this was actually what happened in our province. The peasants who were roused by, and organised in, caste organisations in the early years of the twentieth century were subsequently brought into the fold of the anti-imperialist national movement in the 'twenties and into class organisations of the peasantry in the 'thirties and 'forties; and it was this steady progress of the peasantry from a defeated and leaderless mass (which it was in the years after Velu Thampi and Payassi Raja) to an organised class that is the main driving force of our democratic movement. But, before going into a description of this absorbing topic, we should clear up one point—the economic content and class significance of caste oppression in the conditions of our feudal-colonial economic order.

The Brahmins stand on the highest and the Scheduled Castes on the lowest rung of the caste ladder; the Nayars, other Hindus, Christians and Muslims standing on the rungs in between the two. This system represented, in pre-British days, a system of political administration, the highest caste being so not only from a social point of view but also from the point of view of being the ruling caste. It is true that this system did not continue undisturbed but had already begun to change long before the establishment of British rule. It was however only under the British that the administrative system was made completely independent of the caste system.

With the separation, under the British, of the caste system from the administrative machinery, the caste system acquired a new content: it became a rough index of the economic status of the people, the highest caste being the most prosperous and the lowest ones being economically the most oppressed. It is true that as a result of the development of market relations and the consequent growth of new classes and strata of society, several families of high caste people became pauperised while several in the lower castes became prosperous. It however remains a fact that the comparative prosperity and poverty of an average family in each caste roughly corresponds to the position of that caste in the caste hierarchy.

For example, the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore gives the following percentage distribution of families by castes and annual income groups :

Caste	Annual Income Group							Total
	Below Rs. 60	Rs. 61- 120	Rs. 121- 180	Rs. 181- 300	Rs. 301- 480	Rs. 481- 840	Rs. 840 Above	
Brahmin	5.1	15.1	12.0	21.0	16.1	13.5	17.2	100
Nayar	18.3	33.6	18.3	15.4	7.9	4.1	2.4	100
Ezhava	23.5	42.0	18.0	10.4	3.2	1.3	0.8	100
Other Hindus	15.6	34.0	21.7	15.5	7.1	3.5	1.8	100
Backward communities	27.6	45.5	15.3	8.1	1.9	0.5	1.1	100
Christian	18.1	38.8	18.8	13.7	5.6	3.2	1.8	100
Muslim	20.3	39.1	18.1	12.9	5.2	2.7	1.8	100
All castes	20.5	39.1	18.1	12.9	5.2	2.7	1.7	100

In other words,

- 1) The caste that has the minimum percentage of families in the lowest income group as well as the maximum percentage in the highest income group is the Brahmin.
- 2) The caste that has the maximum percentage of families in the lowest income group are the backward castes, followed by Ezhavas. These are also the two castes that have the minimum percentage of families in the highest income group.

3) The two groups of Hindus that stand in the caste hierarchy in between the Brahmin on the one hand and the Ezhava and backward communities on the other — Nayars and other Hindus—are below the average of all castes in relation to the percentage of families in the two lowest income group (below Rs. 120) while they are above the average in respect of the percentage in the income groups higher than these two.

The same picture is seen in five typical villages of Cochin surveyed in 1936 both as regards per-capita value of property and net annual income per family (see tables on page 107).

It should however be mentioned that the overwhelming majority of people of all castes is interested in the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle, since they are all the victims of feudal-colonial exploitation. For, while it is true, as the figures given above clearly indicate, that a bigger proportion of lower caste people belongs to the low-income groups than higher castes, a good proportion of the latter too are in the low income categories. According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, for example, 868 out of 1630 Brahmin families, i.e., over 50 per cent, have annual incomes of below Rs. 300/- or monthly incomes of below Rs. 25; only 177 out of 1630, or 1 in every 9, Brahmins have annual incomes of above Rs. 1,200/- or monthly incomes of above Rs. 100. That this compares favourably to the Ezhava with 93.9 per cent below the Rs. 300 level, to the Christian with 89.4 per cent, to the Nayar with 85.6 per cent, to other Hindus with 86.8 per cent, to the backward communities with 86.5 per cent and to the Muslim with 90.4 per cent respectively in the same category, does not negate the fact that the incomes of over half the families even in the highest caste are below the subsistence level.

It is in the covering up of this basic poverty of the masses of all communities, of the consequent need of the masses of all communities for the ending of the feudal-colonial economy, that the potentially reactionary character of the caste and communal organisations consists. We shall see further on that these organisations at a subsequent stage of their evolution began to play precisely this role of preventing the development of class consciousness among the masses by harping on caste separatism. But, in the first stage of their development, they played a totally different role, the role of infusing

the spirit of revolt among the downtrodden masses though of particular castes, of organising them against the regime of oppression and injustice. That is why Sri Narayana Guru, the saintly leader of the Ezhavas, must be considered the first inspirer and organiser of the mass democratic movement of the cultivating and landless peasant masses of Kerala. The communal organisations of lower castes are thus the first form in which the peasantry got itself organised and started its struggle for democracy.

Caste	Per-capita Value of Property in				
	Anthikkad	Chundal	Venganallur	Vallivattam	Tiruvaliyad
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Namboodiri	30,593	94,179	18,449	—	—
Nayar	3,397	3,902	942	1,847	6,326
Other Caste					
Hindus	10,848	5,250	2,772	—	24,918
Ezhava	850	521	69	887	263
Pulaya*	13	30	18	7	17
Paraya*	—	20	—	—	—
Kanakka*	—	22	—	13	—
Muslim	412	217	243	1,410	258
Christian	1,772	1,381	204	1,070	8,483

\* Scheduled castes.

Caste	Net Annual Income per Family in				
	Anthikkad	Chundal	Venganallur	Vallivattam	Tiruvaliyad
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Namboodiri	496	2,887	520	—	—
Nayar	179	215	134	89	278
Other Caste					
Hindus	818	360	222	—	—
Ezhava	98	107	107	118	126
Pulaya*	83	112	79	112	101
Paraya*	—	94	—	—	—
Kanakka*	—	—	—	—	—
Muslim	107	113	113	99	111
Christian	134	128	109	148	96

Scheduled castes

## *Chapter VIII*

### THE GREAT NATIONAL UPSURGE AND THE DISGRACEFUL BETRAYAL

(1)

We have seen in an earlier chapter that the industrial bourgeoisie is very weakly developed in Kerala because our economy is feudal-colonial rather than capitalistic. This however does not mean that there is no bourgeoisie class, since our country is part of the capitalistic world economy and controlled by the most powerful capitalist world power. The development of market relations in our country necessarily led, as we have seen, to the development of certain classes and strata of society which, though closely tied to pre-capitalist modes of production, are simultaneously tied to the system of world capitalism.

Which are these classes and strata of society that are simultaneously tied to pre-capitalist modes of production and to world capitalism?

Firstly, the landlords, usurers and non-cultivating tenants who look upon their land not as a manifestation of feudal powers and privileges but as a form of investment on which they should get adequate return, i.e., those who have made it their practice to look upon land as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market. The characteristic feature which marks them off from other landlords is that their outlook towards property is capitalistic; the feature which marks them off from capitalists is that their mode of exploitation is feudal rent and not capitalistic surplus value.

Secondly, the well-to-do cultivators and capitalist landlords who do not themselves work in the fields but employ wage-labour to get their lands cultivated, or engage far more of wage labour than their own or family labour. Here the direct mode of production is capitalistic. i.e., appropriation of surplus value; but it is tied to the feudal form of exploitation in several ways: liability of the cultivator to pay rent to land

lords, mortgage on land, the cultivator himself being a usurer, his labourers working under semi-serf conditions, etc.

Thirdly, traders, wholesale and retail. They are the direct representatives of capitalistic economy, being the agency through which the national market operates. They too however are tied to feudal modes of production and exploitation in several ways, their customers and they themselves being mostly tenants or landlords.

Fourthly, the Government officials and professionals (lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, etc.) and other intellectuals. They too are drawn from classes which are tied to feudal forms of exploitation as landlords or tenants. They are however part of an administrative apparatus which is designed to keep Indian economy tied to the world market and which therefore is an essentially capitalistic state machine.

Fifthly, industrial capitalists, though comparatively few in number, are the people who are tied to the capitalistic mode of production to a far greater extent than anybody else, since they, together with capitalist farmers, are the first real appropriators of surplus value. They too however are indirectly tied to feudal forms of exploitation—many of them even directly. Many of them are themselves feudal landlords (e.g. the proprietors of the Tiruvannur Cotton Mill near Calicut and of the Nirmal Glass Works near Olavakkot). Several others are such that, though they started as industrialists, have recently acquired the status of landlords as well, since they had nowhere to invest their profits except on land. Such landlords, for example, are Samuel Aaron of Cannanore. Seetharama Iyer of Trichur, Thangal Kunju Musaliar of Quilon, etc. The rest are tied to feudal forms of exploitation not as exploiters but as the exploited; for they are tenants of feudal landlords and are thus subject to payment of rent and other forms of feudal exploitation.

Finally, there are the artisans, peasants, workers and low-paid salaried employees, all of whom are subject on the one hand to the exploitation of the manipulations of the market and of the capitalistic system of taxation, while, on the other hand, they are in several ways tied to feudal exploitation.

The growth of these classes and strata of society dealt as heavy a blow to the social and ideological superstructure of pre-capitalist Kerala as the development of market relations did to its economic basis. Just as the development of market relations broke the self-sufficient economy of Kerala, bringing it

into the fold of the capitalist world market, so did the growth of these classes and strata of society bring the social and ideological system of Kerala under the influence of world capitalist culture. Just as it was under the British capitalist system that Kerala was made part of the world capitalist system, so was it under the influence of the British that capitalist culture was brought into Kerala. Just as the development of market relations did not destroy the pre-capitalist economy but transformed it from a militarist-feudal to feudal-colonial economy, so was the introduction of capitalist culture a superimposition on, and not the destruction of, the pre-capitalist ideological superstructure.

One of the distinguishing features of the new classes and strata that grew up in British days is that they were drawn from all castes. Disregarding all caste injunctions that so and so should take up such and such jobs, everybody got such training for, and sought such jobs, as he or she liked. Government officials, professionals, traders, etc., grew up from all castes including those that are on the lowest rungs of the ladder; on the other hand, people of even the highest castes became pauperised and were forced to seek jobs that could not have been dreamt of by their predecessors of a couple of generations ago.

It is true that higher castes had ampler opportunities of getting better jobs than their lower caste brethren; even as recently as in 1941, Brahmins who formed only 1.6 per cent of the total population in Travancore constituted 20.8 per cent of the professional classes earning above Rs. 1,200/- a year, while Ezhavas with a population which is 17.5 per cent of the total got only 4.2 per cent of the professional jobs of the same income group (*Travancore Economic Survey*). But the very fact that at least a few of the low caste people got jobs that are considered respectable, that the people of high castes had to compete with their low-caste brethren in schools, offices, factories, markets, etc., was enough to shatter the social system based on caste separatism. Real day-to-day life, the intense competition between individuals and groups to live better than others, made it impossible for people of higher castes to claim that they are superior to other castes; it also gave hope and confidence to the people of lower castes that they need not submit to their humiliating position.

It was out of this that the first form of the modern democratic movement took its origin in Kerala—the movement for

**social equality.** It was the Nayars, the Ezhavas and the Syrian Christians who took the lead in this because they are the most enlightened among the unprivileged sections, or rather sections with comparatively fewer privileges. Very soon, however, it spread to other castes like the scheduled castes and even to Brahmins. Each of these castes began with agitation for some specific demands of that caste alone, but they all went steadily forward and, in a couple of generations, came to the general slogan of "abolition of all caste restrictions."

We have seen in the last chapter how the Ezhavas under their saintly leader, Sri Narayana Guru, organised themselves in their caste organisation and how Nayars and Christians also were at that time fighting against Brahmin domination. Now, it was this Sri Narayana Guru who coined the slogan "One caste, one God, one religion". That slogan brought about a veritable social revolution—among the Ezhavas to begin with but it very rapidly caught the imagination of radicals belonging to all castes. For, it gave concrete expression to the dissatisfaction felt not only by the peasants but by the middle classes as well, against the outmoded system which kept some castes below others. Inter-caste dining, inter-caste marriage, etc. began to be preached on a large scale and practised too, though on a much smaller scale.

This movement however did not confine itself to the demand for the abolition of inequalities based on caste. It also demanded the total overhauling of the family system, i. e., conversion of the family from a matriarchal to a patriarchal one; prohibition of polygamy, polyandry and other forms of sexual relationships that have been handed down to us from ancient tribal society; an end to the imparible character of the joint family (both patriarchal and matriarchal). At the same time, this movement encouraged and advocated marriage on the basis of love and not on the basis of the will of parents. The objective of the movement was thus the establishment of the bourgeois family.

It was through this latter aspect of the movement that the higher castes—the Namboodiris, the Nayars and other caste Hindus—came into the movement for social reform. Individual partition of joint family property became the rallying slogan first of the Nayars, then of the Namboodiris and ultimately of all caste Hindus. Abolition of the matriarchal family and its substitution by the patriarchal family became the slogan of all progressive Nayars, while the abolition of the system under

which the eldest son alone marries within the caste became the slogan of progressive Namboodiris; abolition of polygamy and other outmoded forms of marriage was demanded by all progressive Hindus. These demands of the progressives of various castes were given legislative approval in the form of a series of enactments like the Nayar Regulation, the Marumakkothayam (Matriarchal) Act, the Namboodiri Act, the Kshatriya Act, the Ezhava Regulation, etc.

This thirst for basic transformations in the social system was also reflected in the field of culture. One of the leaders and organisers of the caste organisation of the Ezhavas, Kumaran Asan, was also the pioneer of modern lyrical poetry in Malayalam; it was he who took the initiative in describing the emotions of ordinary young men and women in love instead of confining himself to describing the heroic deeds of gods or kings as conventional poets used to. Together with Asan, the founder of lyrical poetry, was the founder of the Malayalam novel, Chandu Menon, whose "Indulekha" was the first effective exposure of the decadent practices of the jenmis and their satellites. Other branches of literature like the essay, the short story, the newspaper and magazine article, the book review, etc. also began to take shape. Grammar, rhetoric and other branches of the science of language and writing also appeared. Other forms of cultural activity like drama, painting and other arts, music, etc. began to develop though to a much smaller extent than literature.

The combination of these social and cultural activities of the middle classes and those of the enlightened sections of the upper classes with the spontaneous discontent of the peasant masses—the combination, in the same person or group, of the social reformer, the leader of cultural life, the organiser of the Tenancy Movement and the organiser of the caste associations—was the initial form in which a really national and democratic movement first took shape in Kerala. It was in this combination that the unorganised and leaderless mass of peasantry was first brought under the leadership of those sections of the bourgeoisie that had started developing.

This movement was not yet a national movement in the real sense of the term since it was not directed against the national oppressor—the British imperialists. Nor was it even a genuine anti-feudal movement since it was not directed against the princely order nor did it demand the total abolition of landlordism. It was, however, the beginning of the

national democratic movement since it united the cultivating and landless peasant with the bourgeois and even with the enlightened section of the feudal ruling class. The literary associations and activities of the early years of the twentieth century in which members of the ruling families of Cochin and Travancore and other families of the feudal class cooperated with the members of the untouchable, Christian and Muslim communities, the caste associations in which people of all walks of life (in a particular community) joined in demanding and collectively enforcing particular social reforms, the Tenancy Movement which united the highest-paid Government official and professional with the humblest peasant—these were the beginnings of a new form of united action of the immense majority of the people for the benefit not of a small minority 'but of the entire nation. It was, in other words, the initial form of that national upsurge which swept the country in the 'twenties and 'thirties of this century.

## (2)

It was however only in the years after the end of the First World War that the national movement described in the last section went out of its purely social reform and cultural limits and acquired the character of a political movement. For, it was then that the middle classes and the peasantry were drawn into the big political upheaval that was then sweeping over all parts of India.

Political activity had, of course, started long before the First World War. Those professionals from among the Malayalees who were residing in Madras, and had thus had the opportunity, participated in the activities of the Indian National Congress. One of them, the late Sir C. Sankaran Nair, was even elected to the presidency of one of the earliest sessions of the Congress. It is also remarkable that the first Malayalam novel, "Indulekha", is not only an exposure of the decadent jenmi and joint family system of Kerala but also contains appreciative references to the Congress. But this was confined more to the professional Malayalees living outside Kerala than to the people of Kerala.

The years between the partition of Bengal and the beginning of the First World War, which made tremendous changes in the political situation of India, were years of comparative  
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political inactivity in Kerala. The solitary incident which may be said to be an indication that the Malayalee middle class was slowly but unmistakably coming into political activity was the determined fight put up by the late K. Ramakrishna Pillai, a radical journalist of Trivandrum, against the then Dewan of Travancore. His articles in the paper *Swadeshabhimani* were so powerful an exposure of the Dewan's misdeeds that Ramakrishna Pillai was exiled from Travancore in 1910. It is significant that Ramakrishna Pillai was the first author in Malayalam language—and, to the knowledge of the writer of these lines, in any Indian language—to write a biography of Karl Marx; his *Karl Marx* appeared in 1912. Had Lenin come to know of this as he came to know of the 1905 strike action of the Bombay working class, he would have said not only the Indian middle class was coming into action but that the Indian intellectuals were on the way to becoming the vehicles of Socialist consciousness.

Ramakrishna Pillai however was a solitary figure in the political field in those pre-war years. It is true that he had the sympathy of thousands of ordinary men and women in Travancore: as he himself describes in his article on "Exile", tens of thousands of people crowded around him at Trivandrum and on the way to the border of Travancore when he was being taken out of the State. The middle class, as a class, was however not yet conscious enough to transform this popular sentiment into a militant people's movement. What is more, Ramakrishna Pillai himself did not go further than exposing the misdeeds of the Dewan; he did not realise the necessity of ending either the system of the princely autocracy in the state of Travancore or of the imperialist domination in India, or even bringing about reforms in the system. Hence, though Ramakrishna Pillai's fight against the Dewan may be considered to be the beginning of the entry of the middle class into the arena of politics, the solitary nature of his fight should be taken as an indication that they had a long way to go before becoming an active political force.

It was in the years of war and after that the situation changed. The Home Rule Movement initiated and powerfully led by Mrs. Besant caught the imagination of the middle class in Kerala. A significant incident took place at Calicut where a meeting was being held under the chairmanship of the Collector to canvass support for Britain's war effort. A member of the audience, M. P. Narayana Menon who started to speak

in Malayalam, was asked by the chairman to speak in English, but refused to do so. This led to a commotion in the meeting. It was, in fact, far more than a single incident, for it showed that the young and growing middle class was no more prepared to let the domination of the British rulers go unchallenged. Mr. Narayana Menon was opposed not only to speaking in English in his own country, but also to India giving war loans to Britain, for said he, "it is strange for a debtor (India) to give loans to a creditor (Britain)".

Narayana Menon however was not a solitary figure as Ramakrishna Pillai was a few years ago. Other men and women of the middle class had also become politicalised. Home Rule Leagues were springing up all over Malabar. But it was the students of Trivandrum who played the role of pioneers of political demonstrations. In November 2, 1919 was organised the first political demonstration of students in the history of Kerala—the demonstration of protest in front of the Thampanur Hall where Government stooges were holding a meeting, in the name of the public of Trivandrum, in support of the constitutional reforms that were then being introduced in Travancore. This was an index showing that students had already entered the arena of political activity. This was followed two years later (in September-October 1921) by the mass students' strike against the enhancement of fees that was made by the Government at that time, followed by the first ferocious attack on students by the minions of the Government.

The entry of the middle class into the arena of political activity gave the peasants what they had been lacking ever since the days of Velu Thampi and Payassi Raja—leadership in militant struggle. Home Rule Leagues in the latter years of the war and the first post-war years; Congress and Khilafat Committees in 1920-21; Tenancy Committees which worked hand in hand with the Congress Committees—these were the organs of struggle through which the middle class tried to organise the broad masses of the people against British imperialism and feudal landlordism. The Malabar District Political Conference (1920) held at Manjeri, where the battle was fought between the advocates and opponents of the policy of Non-violent Non-cooperation, was the first example of peasants being mobilised by the radical middle class in support of a militant political line; it is significant that, together with the issue of Non-cooperation, there was the issue of Tenancy Re-

by the difference in the historically evolved material conditions of Malabar on the one hand and Travancore-Cochin on the other. For, one of the "reforms" made by the pre-British rulers of these two States (Marthanda Varma and Rama Varma in Travancore and Sakthan Thampuran in Cochin) was that they confiscated the landed properties of all those feudal chieftains who resisted the attempts of the rulers to create a centralised administrative apparatus. The result of this was that considerable part of lands in both these states became *Pandara Vaka* or the Ruler's property. Travancore had an additional "reform" under "Resident-Dewan" Munro (Col. Munro who followed Col. Macaulay as Resident was simultaneously the Dewan of Travancore and Cochin and Resident) where the Government had all the landed properties of Hindu temples (Devaswam) transferred to Government which met the expenses of the temples out of its revenue. The lands that are thus the property of the Government in one or another sense constitute in Travancore 75 per cent of all cultivable lands in the State plus all the fallow, waste and forest lands. The percentage of such Government lands in Cochin (where the confiscation of the feudal chieftain's lands was less thorough than in Travancore and where Dewaswam lands were not transferred to the Government) is 50 per cent. Malabar on the other hand has virtually no Government lands, all the cultivable, waste, fallow and even forest lands (except Government Reserves and small stretches of Porombokes) being declared private property.

The grip of the rent-receiving landlords was therefore far greater in Malabar than in Cochin or Travancore where there was greater opportunity for well-to-do cultivators to make savings and to develop into capitalist farmers, moneylenders etc. It was under the strong pressure of these elements—what may be termed the rising rural bourgeois elements—that the Maharaja of Travancore issued his 1820 proclamation advising the jenmis not to eject kanamdaras, followed by the 1867 proclamation and the 1896 Act which totally prohibited ejectment. It was also under the pressure of the same elements that the Maharaja of Cochin had a Tenancy Act passed in 1915. It was again these elements that started the agitation against caste inequalities and for the reform of the family, inheritance and marriage system, in respect of which again we find that Malabar had its legislations passed more than a decade later than Travancore and Cochin.

While this difference in the historically-evolved material conditions explains the greater tempo in the States of the social reform phase of the National Movement, it is not by itself an adequate explanation for the greater tempo in Malabar of the later anti-imperialist, political struggle, phase. For, the greater strength and vitality of the rising rural bourgeois elements in the States had also expressed itself in the political field, as is witnessed by the example of Ramakrishna Pillai at a time when Malabar was politically quiet. Even in the period of the great post-war national-political upsurge Travancore and Cochin contributed their share of militant anti-imperialists. It was because of the pro-feudal policy of the bourgeois national leadership—which, under the false assumption that the struggle was only against Britain and not against “Indian” rulers, evolved the theory that “the national movement should not interfere in the internal affairs of Indian States”—that the cultivating and landless peasants in the States were not brought into political activity.

Travancore and Cochin would have had the same combination as Malabar of middle-class democrats with the revolutionary peasantry if only the national bourgeoisie which headed the 1919-22 upsurge had realised that the princes and their satellites in the so-called “Indian” States are as much the stooges of British imperialism as big landlords and other feudal elements in “British” India. It may be recalled that it was the combination of the political struggle of the entire people with the anti-feudal struggle of the peasantry (for tenancy reform) that made 1920-21 in Malabar memorable for its glorious national upsurge. There is no doubt that the same thing would have happened in Travancore and Cochin if only the leadership of the National Movement had made the same judicious combination of the anti-British with the anti-feudal struggle. For, as Ramakrishna Pillai’s struggle against the then Dewan of Travancore showed and as the suppressed discontent against the rulers’ favouritism in both states even in 1920-21 showed, there was acute discontent against the rotten and corrupt administration in these states; it was only absence of a conscious leadership to head it that prevented this popular discontent transforming itself into a powerful political movement.

Such a leadership however was absent not only in “Indian” States but even in “British” India. For, it is notorious that the bourgeois national leadership under Mahatma

Gandhi was more anxious to restrain the revolutionary masses and to keep them strictly within "non-violent" limits than to deal powerful blows against British imperialism and its reactionary Indian allies. It had, to this end, worked out the anti-democratic theory of the exploiters being the "trustees" of the exploited as well as the theory of the masses having no moral right to offer militant resistance to the exploiter and oppressor.

Such an anti-democratic leadership was bound, at some stage or other, to come into clash with the Moplah peasants that were roused to activity in Malabar in 1920-21. For, they were, unlike the leadership, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal in the real and full sense of the term. They were genuinely anxious not only to end British rule in India and make our country free, but also to end British domination in Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. Their hatred for the alien oppressor was deep-seated. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of them being either landless peasants or poor peasants holding lands on Verumpattam tenure, they wanted not only fixity of tenure for the kanamdar as was demanded by the leaders of the Tenancy Movement but major changes in the land system including substantial reduction in rent payable by Verumpattamdars.

This anti-imperialist and anti-feudal character of the Moplah peasantry naturally made it extremely unlikely that they would remain for long confined to the limits of non-violence laid down by the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. It was not for a non-violent Non-cooperation Movement but for real militant action of the masses that the Moplah peasantry was being organised by their local and middle leadership. And this organisation was so thorough that the soldiers of the mighty British Empire had to fight hard for nearly six months to quell the revolt. The fact that leaders of the rebellion like Haji Kunhahmmed established a real people's government in the areas controlled by them, the few pitched battles that were fought between the rebels and the British army (like the well-known Battle of Pookottur) and the skilful use made of the terrain of South Malabar for guerilla tactics showed that the Moplah peasants, when roused to action, were resourceful enough to devise ways and means of fighting an enemy superior in every respect except in that of people's support.

The bourgeois leadership of the national movement, how-

ever, was not prepared for such a combination of the national and agrarian revolutionary movements. On the other hand, the more well-organised and militant the peasants grew, the more panicky became the leadership. Instead of trying to learn the art of revolutionary resistance from the peasantry, they tried to teach the peasants the art of "non-violent" surrender. Instead of helping the Moplah peasantry, the vanguard of the agrarian revolutionary movement in Kerala, to unite the entire peasantry, they abandoned the vanguard to the tender mercies of the British troops. Had it not been for this disgraceful betrayal by the leadership at the crucial moment, the history of the glorious rebellion of 1921 would have been different.

It is necessary at this stage to dispose of the false theory that the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 was a Moplah Rebellion. This theory has gained currency because it was the Moplah peasants who acted as the vanguard in the movement. Nor need it be disputed that, at a subsequent stage of the movement, i.e., at the stage when British troops had started their depredations and when the British rulers and their Hindu stooges had spread the canard of Muslim fanaticism being the source of the militancy of the peasants, the movement acquired a communal colour. It is however far from the truth to say that the rebellion was a communal riot, that the objective of the rebels was the destruction of Hindu religion and that the six months of rebellion were six months of anti-Hindu atrocities.

This will be clear from a few extracts from the booklet on the "Moplah Rebellion" by the late C. Gopalan Nair, a retired Deputy Collector and a natural champion of the official view. It should also be stated that this booklet has been commended to the readers by no less a person than the Collector of Malabar. On the initial incident of the rebellion, the author says:

"The house of V. Mohammed, the local Khilafat Secretary, was searched by the Police for a gun alleged to have been stolen from the Pookottur Palace of the Nilambur Thirumulpad and this gave the Moplahs the opportunity for which they were waiting, of asserting the authority and force of the Khilafat Movement. On the pretext that the search was unjust and uncalled for, a crowd of several hundreds of Moplahs armed with knives, swords and spears, collected with astounding rapidity and advanced to the Palace. It transpired that they had been summoned

from various neighbouring and outlying villages by a tocsin of drums beaten in local and neighbouring mosques. They levied blackmail from the landlords on threat of murder and also threatened to murder the Circle-Inspector of Police who recognised the necessity of dealing tactfully.....

"No evidence has yet been forthcoming to warrant the allegation regarding agrarian discontent, but it would appear that *there was some trouble—what it was, it is not possible to say—between the Pookottur Moplahs and the Manager Thirumulpad of the Pookottur Estate*. Their lack of cordiality was aggravated by the Police search instituted at the instance of the Manager and V. Mohammed exploited the Khilafat Movement and the factious temper of his co-religionists to wreak vengeance. The Moplahs demanded their wages at 9 o'clock that night, threatened the Manager and became turbulent. And in this jungly, remote and fanatical hamlet of Pookottur, the Civil Administration practically ceased to function from 2nd August, 1921." (pp. 21-23)

On page 30 he says: "In the realm of industry, the Moplah has no rival: his good qualities in ordinary life are admitted; during the rebellion several instances have occurred of Moplahs having helped Hindus to escape, but individual instances do not prove the rule."

The short biographical sketches that he gives on pp. 76-89 of some of the rebel leaders are most illuminating.

"Variankunnath Kunhahmed Haji, of a family of outbreak traditions, as a lad was transported with his father for complicity in a previous outbreak; on his return 6 or 7 years ago was not allowed to settle down in his native village but after a time he went up to his village and started life as a cartman.

"On the introduction of the Khilafat Movement he joined it and became one of its chief workers, organised Sabhas and became the guiding spirit of the Khilafat in Ernad. On the outbreak of the rebellion he became King, celebrated his accession by the murder of Khan Bahadur Chekkutty, a Moplah retired Police Inspector.

"He styled himself as the Raja of the Hindus, Amir of the Mohammedans and Colonel of the Khilafat Army. He

wore a fez cap, wore the Khilafat uniform and badge and he had a sword in his hand. He enjoyed absolute Swaraj in his Kingdom of Ernad and Walluvanad. He announced that he was aware that the inhabitants have suffered greatly from robbing and looting, *that he would impose no taxation on them this year (1921) save in the way of donations to the yudha fund and that next year the taxes must be forthcoming. He ordered members of agricultural labourers to reap and bring in the paddy raised in the Thirumulpad's lands*, the harvester being paid in cash and the grain set apart to feed the Haji's forces. He issued passports to persons wishing to get outside his Kingdom and *the cost of the pass was a very flexible figure, according to the capacity of the individual concerned.*

*"He was captured on 6th January and shot on 20th January, 1922."*

This was the most outstanding of rebel leaders. Now about two of the lesser ones.

*"Seethi Koya Thangal of Kumarampathur set himself up as the Governor of a Khilafat Principality. He issued Fatwas warning his men against looting, and other degradations pointing out that the country had become theirs. Three of the rioters implicated in Elampalasseri were punished by him holding his own Court Martial. The offenders were ordered to be shot, taking care only to use blank cartridges. The men terrified fell down. When they rose there were no injuries which the Thangal attributed to his own marvellous powers and added that his men will similarly be immune from British military attacks. He was captured and shot.*

*"Chembrasseri Imbichi Koya Thangal held his court about midway between Tirur and Karuvarakundu on the slope of a bare hillock with about 4000 followers from neighbouring villages. More than 40 Hindus were taken to the Thangal with their hands tied behind their back, charged with the crime of helping the military by supplying them with milk, tender cocoanuts, etc., and 38 of these were condemned to death. He superintended the work of murder in person and took his seat on a rock near a well, witnessed his men cutting at the necks of his victims and pushing the bodies into the well. 38 were murdered, one of whom a pensioned Head Constable, to whom he*

owed a grudge, had his head neatly divided into two halves. Surrendered at Melattur and shot on 20th January, 1922." (All emphasis mine—E.M.S.N.)

Mohammed, the Khilafat Secretary, who led the Moplahs against an unpopular estate manager; Kunhahmed Haji, the murderer of a Moplah retired Police Inspector; Seethi Koya Thangal who punished looters in his own camp; Chembrasseri Thangal who murdered 38 persons *for helping the military*—these are not the type of leaders of fanatical Moplahs whose one object in life is to harass and exterminate the Kaffirs. But the most crushing evidence against official apologists is the number of Hindu temples destroyed or desecrated during the five months of more or less rebel domination. On November 14, 1922, the Government spokesman answered on the floor of the Madras Legislative Council as follows:

"No statistics have been compiled, but the number of temples destroyed or desecrated must exceed 100. The number is probably large, but for obvious reasons the Government have purposely refrained from attempting to collect accurate figures."

Now the number of amsoms (revenue villages) affected by the rebellion are 220. Calculating at very conservative rate of 5 Hindus temples per amsom, this 100 comes to 9 per cent. Even out of these, it is difficult to know how many were desecrated on suspicion of being used by the military. But leaving that aside, and taking it for granted that all were destroyed or desecrated on purely religious grounds, 9 per cent seems to be a surprisingly low figure for a communal outbreak during the first weeks of which the rebels were entirely dominating the scene.

The figures for civilian casualties tell the same tale. On page 58 of the booklet already quoted, the author says: "It is impossible in the absence of a census of the rebel area, to state the number of persons who were killed by the rebels, but the number of persons among the civilian population is believed to be between 500 to 600 according to information supplied by Government."

"No statistics have been compiled regarding the number of women and children among the killed." (*Madras Mail*, November 14, 1922). 500 to 600 civilians killed in an area with

about 4 lakhs of Hindus in it is not an impressive record for a communal riot of more than 5 months' duration. Its full significance is only seen when it is remembered that this 500 to 600 includes Khan Saheb Chekkutty, the Moplah retired Inspector, the 38 Hindus killed by Chembrasseri Thangal on the charge of helping the military and such similar incidents. How many out of the 500 to 600 were in fact killed for purely religious reasons, it is difficult to say. Their number, however, cannot be very large.

What about forced conversions? Pandit Rishi Ram, the Arya Samaj Missionary, says in a letter: "In the Arya Samaj registers alone 1,766 cases of forced conversions have been recorded and if the figures from all relief committees were collected, their number is sure to exceed 2,500." (p. 119 of the booklet already quoted). 2,500 forced conversions in an area with 4 lakh Hindus is very low indeed, if it is a communal riot!

All this, however, does not mean that religious fanaticism was totally absent in the rebellion. The number of forced conversions which did take place (even if Pandit Rishi Ram's figures are excessive, coming as they do from an Arya Samajist) cannot by any stretch of imagination be explained by any other motive than religious fanaticism. Nor is it to be wondered at that the intensely religious, extremely uneducated and highly organised community of Moplahs should contain among them a few fanatics who took it into their heads that every 'Kaffir' killed or converted was a stepping stone on their own path to heaven. A certain percentage of casualties should be so counted. One can and should, however, state explicitly that the main force behind the rebellion was not fanaticism which was simply a by-product of the rebellion.

The following extracts from the official history of the Congress in Kerala, published by the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee in 1935, are also revealing:—

"Down to August 28th, when the battle of Pookottur took place, the British administration may be said to have ceased to exist in Malappuram, Thirurangadi, Manjeri, Perintalmanna—all these places were the fields of unrestricted activity of the rebels. Nobody resisted them, hence they had no need to resist anybody or to organise revolt against anybody. It was only Police Inspector Chekkutty, a police Head Constable and a few men of the Nilambur

Tirumalpad who were murdered by the rebels at this stage. The statement of a witness cited by the prosecution itself says that the behaviour of the rebels at this stage was not such as to frighten the ordinary people in any way.....

"With the coming of the military, the mentality of both the rebels as well as of the common people underwent a change. The 'battle' of Pookottur and the clashes with the military at several other places disrupted the hitherto solid forces of the rebels; the loss of the personnel and the dangerous situation facing them made the rebels desperate. The common people in their turn had to face a very difficult situation since, as in all wars, neutrality was dangerous. Those Hindus who did not give all co-operation to the military would be considered sympathetic to the rebels. The helpless Hindus, therefore, were sometimes forced to give information to the military regarding the whereabouts and movements of the rebels. This naturally created suspicion among the Moplahs who began to get furious against the Hindus. It was thus that the originally non-communal movement of a section of the common people was ultimately transformed into a communal Moplah rebellion."

It was natural for the people of a caste-ridden country with a feudal-colonial economy to start their struggle for democracy in the form of a struggle for the equality of all castes and from there to go forward to the struggle for political and economic democracy. This, as we have seen, was the course taken by the people of Kerala in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

But, since the people were led by a class that was not prepared to go as far as their followers wanted them to go—by the national bourgeoisie which was not prepared to smash the feudal-colonial economy and replace it by an economy that would satisfy the needs of the people, but only to make such adjustments in the economy as would help them to get a bigger share in the fruits of exploitation—the movement received a severe setback. The years after 1921 may be said to be years of reaction as far as the national democratic movement is concerned.

Although the Congress-Khilafat-Tenancy Movement in Malabar started as a movement of all communities, it was

transformed into a communal movement mainly because the national bourgeois leadership of the movement refused to lead it as a movement against imperialism and feudalism. The result was not only that imperialism could crush the movement; not only that South Malabar, the area of the 1921 rebellion, was put under martial law for some time and then under severe police rule; not only that over 20,000 peasants were sent to jail for long terms and to the Andamans; but that the very atmosphere of the country was vitiated by the poison of communalism.

The Hindu intelligentsia of Malabar started going more or less in the same direction as their counterparts in North India. The Arya Samaj and other Hindu communal organisations came and started their work in Malabar, first by way of affording relief to Hindu refugees fleeing from the areas of the rebellion, then by reconverting those Hindus who had been forcibly converted to Islam by the rebels and ultimately going even to the extent of converting Muslims to Hinduism. The Muslim intelligentsia were terror-stricken because of the post-rebellion repression that they had to go through, but were nevertheless extremely indignant. They could do nothing but remain sulking for the time being, but that was by itself sufficient for the creation of an atmosphere ideally suited for communal squabbles.

It is true that this did not lead to the communal tension and communal riots so familiar to the people of North India. The Sudhi, the Sanghatan, the anti-cow-slaughter and anti-music-before-mosques campaign, etc., did not catch the imagination of the people here as they did in North India. The main reason for this is that the Hindus here are so caste-ridden, the caste rules regarding their mutual social relations are so rigid, that it is extremely difficult to create a real sense of Hindu solidarity. The low-caste people felt more at home with Muslims and Christians than with their own co-religionists of the higher caste, the caste Hindus in their turn could not see why, if they could inter-dine and inter-marry with low caste Hindus, they could not do the same with Muslims and Christians. As a matter of fact, there was a movement among certain low-caste people for their wholesale conversion into any other religion, since that would give them greater social equality. The Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha etc. could not therefore take deep roots in Kerala.

This however does not mean that there was no Hindu and

Muslim communalism. In fact, Malabar Congressmen themselves were split into Hindus and Muslims. When they started reorganising the Congress in the post-rebellion years, there were virtually two centres of the Congress—one Hindu and the other Muslim—each having its own paper, *Mathrubhoomi* and *Al-Ameen*. It is also remarkable that some Hindu Congressmen were themselves the organisers of the Hindu Maha-sabha. The gulf between the two groups was so wide that, though each claimed to be a group of Congressmen, one could not cooperate with the other even in organising the Congress. It was only long after the Muslim League started becoming strong, and even then not to any considerable extent, that the gulf was bridged.

The main form of communalism however was caste against caste and not Hindu versus Muslim. The non-caste Hindus of Malabar like the Tiyyas were organised against the Congress on the plea that the Congress was an organisation of caste Hindus, particularly Nayars. Demands of these backward or untouchable castes for special consideration with regard to educational facilities, sharing of Government jobs etc., were pushed to the foreground in place of the national demand of freedom from imperialism. The British administrators were even looked upon as friends of the backward and untouchable castes and sincerely anxious to protect them from the oppression of caste Hindus. The unity of castes and communities that had been brought about in the years of the anti-imperialist upsurge was thus disrupted.

This phenomenon was particularly to be noted in the States part of Kerala where there was no political movement of any sort. Malabar did have, at least nominally, a skeleton Congress organisation which held its meetings and conferences, enrolled members and carried on other political activities including participation in elections. (In the elections both to the Madras and Central Legislatures, Congressmen contested as Swarajist candidates in the post-1921 years). What is more, Congress Committees also participated in the campaign for the enactment of Tenancy Legislation. The States part of Kerala did not have even this much of political activity since the policy of the Congress continued to be one of “non-interference in the internal affairs of Indian States”. The result was that politics in the States revolved entirely around castes. Almost every election that took place in Travancore and

Cochin was fought on the lines of which caste is to have its representatives in the Legislature.

It is of course true that caste conflicts had taken place even in the pre-1921 years, but the caste conflicts of those earlier years had the character of conflicts between the masses of slowly awakening low-castes and the higher castes that were oppressing them. The conflicts of the post-1921 years, on the other hand, had the character of conflicts between the upper class elements of various castes for their respective shares in Government jobs and other spoils of office. For example, there was the Nayar-Ezhava conflict in Central Travancore in the year 1905 which had its origin in the hostility of certain aristocratic Nayar families to the admission of Ezhavas into Government schools. There was also the Nayar-Pulaya conflict near Quilon in 1915 which also had its origin in the hostility of the Nayar gentry to the movement for dress reform among Pulaya women. There was, on the other hand, the Nayar-Christian electoral conflict in Central Travancore in 1922 which had its origin in the competition between Nayars and Christians in the matter of starting a school.

This change in the character of caste conflicts can also be seen in the character of the caste organisations. While, in the first stage of their development, they more or less concentrated on social reform, they began, in the second stage to put greater emphasis on getting their share of Government services, seats in legislatures, etc. Even higher castes like the Namboodiris who had a disproportionately greater share of landed and other properties and hence a greater pull on the bureaucracy, but were backward in the matter of modern education and hence in Government services, began to speak in terms of shares in Government services.

The manner in which the national bourgeoisie reacted to these developments was in keeping with its betrayal of the great national upsurge. It just dismissed these caste conflicts and caste organisations as nothing but the false slogans and false organisations inspired by the reactionary stooges of imperialism. It refused to see as we have seen, that these caste conflicts had a real basis in socio-economic reality and that these conflicts will continue to burst out again and again so long as this socio-economic reality continues. Leaders of the caste organisations are able to mobilise the masses belonging to their respective castes not because these masses are inherently caste-minded but because the oppression and exploitation

tion of classes is concealed behind the cover of caste inequality. Caste conflicts can therefore be ended only if the national movement concentrates its fire against the common enemy of the overwhelming majority of the people of all castes—imperialism and feudalism. If only the leadership of the national movement had taken a clear and consistent stand against imperialism and feudalism and, to that end, championed the particular demands of lower castes for social equality, it could have rallied the masses belonging to all castes behind the banner of nationalism.

It was just this that the national leadership refused to do. Not only did it betray the revolutionary struggle of the masses for freedom from imperialist oppression and exploitation but it also looked with hostility at the movement of the lower castes for social equality. Special facilities for the backward castes to enable them to catch up with the higher castes in respect of education, employment, etc., were, in their eyes, caste separatism and not an integral part of the struggle for equality and democracy. The masses belonging to the lower castes therefore could not be roused to action under the flag of nationalism; they were roused by the separatist slogans of the leaders of the caste organisations.

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The reaction that set in in the years after the 1921 rebellion was enough to check the growth but not quench the fire of anti-imperialism that had been set alight in the years 1919-21. Although much reduced in number, a band of Congressmen carried on the minimum organisational work of the Congress; Khadi, Hindi, anti-untouchability and other items of constructive work also helped to keep the flame of anti-imperialism alive. People too responded to these activities magnificently, as was witnessed at Vaikom (in Travancore) where the Satyagraha to establish the right of untouchable castes to walk through the road adjoining the temple brought hundreds of young men and women to activity.

The significance of these post-rebellion activities, however, was that they kept the flame of anti-imperialism alive and prepared the ground for the next wave of struggle. For, it was as the further development of these activities that the new and far bigger round of struggle started all over Kerala.

While the Kerala Provincial Political Conferences of the years 1922-27 were routine affairs which only helped to keep the Congress organisation alive, the conference that was held in 1928 marked a turning point in the history of our anti-imperialist movement. The lively discussion that took place at that conference on the question of Dominion Status versus Complete Independence was an indication that new and vital elements had started emerging inside the Congress. Following, as this did, the hostile demonstrations which greeted the arrival of the Simon Commission on the soil of India, it showed that the youth of Kerala were not lagging behind the other parts of India.

This new awakening of the youth of Kerala manifested itself in the 1930 and 1932 Civil Disobedience movements as well as in the 1931 Satyagraha at Guruvayoor for the right of the untouchables to enter the temple and worship there along with caste Hindus. It was the young Congressmen who beat down the opposition of the older ones to the inauguration of Civil Disobedience in Malabar and forced them to start it. It was again the youth from all parts of Kerala that assembled at Calicut, made the march to Payyannur, the venue of the illicit manufacture of salt, a magnificent anti-imperialist rally and made the civil disobedience at Payyannur a success. Many were the heroic actions that they organised in the ten months of 1930 and the year and a half of 1932-33. So too was the march to Guruvayoor, the two-month-long Satyagraha at the gates of the temple, the militant turn given to the Satyagraha at one stage of the struggle and the countrywide propaganda in its support. It was becoming increasingly clear that youth was coming into its own.

Had it been left to the bourgeois leadership of the national movement to lead the struggles as they liked, this wave of anti-imperialist struggle would have been disgracefully betrayed like the earlier, 1919-21 wave. For, the plan of campaign worked out by that leadership left nothing to chance and made all guarantees that the participants in the movement would not resort to revolutionary forms of struggle. When it was found that, despite these guarantees, the rank and file Congress volunteers were seeking out new and militant forms of struggle, the leadership very successfully diverted the whole struggle from anti-imperialism to anti-untouchability. In Kerala too, the Guruvayoor Temple-entry Satyagraha, which in its initial stages was a campaign for rallying the masses of the un-

touchables and progressive caste Hindus, was very soon converted into a movement which diverted the energies of dozens of democrats from the anti-imperialist struggle. The so-called Harijan uplift movement initiated at the end of 1932 and the Council-entry programme launched in 1933 were enough to put a stop to the militant anti-imperialist actions.

Everything, however, was not left in the hands of the bourgeois leadership. The 1930-32 struggles were started at a time when new forces had already appeared on the political horizon. The student and youth movements that had come into being in the rest of India began to spread in Kerala also. The self-sacrificing revolutionary ardour of Bhagat Singh and his comrades began to echo here also. Vague ideas of Socialism and Communism, stories of what happened and what was taking place in the Soviet Union, had started catching the imagination of the people. Rank and file Congressmen in Kerala came into close contact with the left leaders of the Congress like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and Vithalbhai Patel as well as revolutionaries from Bengal, Bihar, U.P. and Punjab, many of whom were lodged in the various jails of Madras Presidency.

All this led to the development of a well-defined group of revolutionary Congressmen who, though organisationally within the Congress, were ideologically outside the sphere of Gandhian leadership. The result was that, by the time of the abandonment of mass civil disobedience and the adoption of the council-entry programme, the majority of rank and file Congressmen in Kerala had already taken a definite turn to the left. Not only were Yuvak Sanghs, Youth Leagues, etc. organised in the various parts of the province but the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee that came to be organised in 1934 had a majority of leftists. These leftist Congressmen, moreover, declared themselves Socialists and organised the Congress Socialist Party.

While these developments were taking place inside the Congress, revolutionary forces of more or less the same character were taking shape inside the ranks of caste organisations. Despite the efforts made by the leaders of these organisations to shelter their own ranks against the new forces, radical transformations had started taking place among them. Not only did anti-imperialism penetrate these organisations, so that sympathy for political movements became a marked feature of every one of these caste organisations; simultane-

ously with this was taking place an ideological revolution in their ranks. Rationalism, atheism, materialism and, through these, sympathy for the land of Communism—this was the process through which the radical rank and file of the caste organisations came to accept Socialism—at the same time as rank and file Congressmen were groping towards it through their own political experience. The result was that, by the time a definite left-wing took shape inside the Congress, a left-wing had also taken shape inside these caste organisations. The sense of unity and solidarity that each felt with the other was one of the factors which guaranteed that the new revolutionary forces that emerged in the nineteen-thirties would draw into their fold all that was really democratic in the social reform and political wings of the national movement.

One of the characteristic features of the new wave of anti-imperialist struggles was that the struggle for political democracy had started in the States part of Kerala also. The States Peoples' Movement that took shape in other Indian States spread to Travancore where a States Peoples' Conference was held in 1928. This may be said to be the beginning of a movement for political democracy with the central slogan of Responsible Government. The youth of Travancore and Cochin who had to leave their States to participate in the 1930-32 Civil Disobedience movements were as much moved by the need for democracy in the States as by the need for the complete independence of India.

The direct demand for Responsible Government however remained confined to a comparatively narrow circle of progressive democrats until the specific internal politics of the States forced the issue of political democracy. This happened in a peculiar way in Tranvancore; when a new instalment of constitutional reforms was introduced in 1932, the communal organisations of Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims opposed that part of it which dealt with representation in the Legislatures. It was their contention that the quantum and method of representation were such that the Nayars were favoured at the expense of the other communities. In order, therefore, to organise effective opposition to these constitutional reforms, they formed themselves into what is called the Joint Political Congress. Since the three communities together constituted about 70 per cent of the population of the State and since they adopted more or less the same technique to fight these constitutional reforms as the Indian National Congress did against

the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919-21, their campaign unleashed a tremendous mass force. Their boycott of the reforms—of course they did not call it “boycott” but “abstention”, but it meant the same thing—was as effective as the Congress boycott of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. Hence, in spite of its avowedly communal character, radical nationalists welcomed the movement as the first mass political movement in Travancore. It was this movement, together with the repression which the Government launched against it, that led to the subsequent inauguration of the Travancore State Congress with its central slogan of Responsible Government.

Though not of such an intense mass character as in Travancore, Cochin too had its movement for Responsible Government; the leaders of certain communal organisations joined with certain Congressmen to form what is called the Cochin State Congress. The main factor that contributed to this development was the hostility engendered in certain sections of capitalists in the State by the policy of the then Diwan of Cochin, Sir Shanmukham Chetty, which favoured capitalists from outside the State; the wellknown electricity agitation in Trichur, the agitation started by capitalists against the agreement entered into by the State Government with an outside firm for the electrification of Trichur, was as militant and had as much of a mass character as the Joint Political Congress in Travancore; the only difference was that while the former was confined to a town, Trichur, the latter was an all-State movement, though the former was more national since it was an all-communities affair as against the latter which was confined to some. This agitation of native capitalists against capitalists from outside the State brought the powerful Christian community of Trichur on to the side of struggle for political democracy.

The most significant fact of all in the 1930-32 wave of anti-imperialist struggles, the fact that gave the anti-imperialist movement a qualitatively higher character, was that a new class emerged in the political arena—the industrial working class. It was the working class of Alleppey that first organised itself in 1920-21. Nor was it a narrowly economist or trade unionist organisation that they built up for themselves; for one of the earliest Annual Conferences of their Union passed a resolution demanding Responsible Government in the State. It should be noted that this political resolution of the Alleppey working class was adopted long before the Travancore State Congress was inaugurated.

core State Congress was born and even before the Joint Political Congress was formed. Apart from this collective political action of the working class of Alleppey, the workers of Calicut, Cannanore and other centres also participated in political action by individually joining or helping the Civil Disobedience Movement.

It was not, however, till 1934-35 when a series of industrial strikes took place at Cannanore, Calicut, Feroke, Trichur, Cochin and Alleppey that the working class of Kerala got itself organised as a class. Out of these strike actions of the industrial working class arose those characteristically proletarian class organisations, the Trade Unions, organisations which are at once an indivisible part of the general anti-imperialist movement as well as an organisation independent of the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. Significantly enough, this crystallisation of the working-class movement of Kerala into a definite organisation, the All-Kerala Trade Union Congress whose first All-Kerala conference was held at Calicut in May 1935, coincided with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party whose All-Kerala conference was also held in May 1935. There was thus to be seen, in 1934-35, that combination of the working class movement with socialist consciousness which, as Lenin pointed out, would alone guarantee the successful completion of the struggle for full democracy and pave the way for the subsequent struggle for Socialism. This therefore may be considered to be the beginning of a stage in the democratic movement of our country—the stage of the struggle for proletarian hegemony.

## *Chapter IX*

### THE WORKING CLASS IN THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT

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In the election to the Central Legislative Assembly, which the then Governor-General, Lord Willingdon, ordered in 1934 with the firm idea in his mind that the Congress had been weakened by the 1932-33 repression, the Congress candidate from the Malabar-cum-South Kanara general constituency secured over 80 percent of the votes polled. It was thus made clear that the fire of repression had, far from weakening, strengthened the national movement. The Congress had become a real people's organisation with firm roots among the masses. This was made all the more clear in the subsequent general elections to the Provincial Legislatures (1937) when all the Congress candidates in the general constituencies secured overwhelming majorities and several candidates opposing the Congress forfeited their deposits.

While the Congress was thus coming out as the undisputed leader of the democratic people of Malabar, an internal crisis was slowly developing within the Congress organisation itself. The new revolutionary forces of left-nationalism and socialism that had taken shape in the course of the 1930-32 struggle had crystallised into a definite Socialist group within the Congress challenging the Gandhian leadership. No sooner was the Congress reorganised in June-July, 1934 than a bitter struggle started between this left and socialist group and the Gandhian leadership inside the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee.

It has already been mentioned that the K. P. C. C. of 1934-35 was one with a leftist majority. It was therefore natural that the Provincial Political Conference which that Committee organised in May 1935 should have on its agenda a series of resolutions giving expression to revolutionary sentiments. Resolutions demanding the abolition of Indian States,

drawing attention to the growing danger of war, supporting the immediate demands of workers and peasants, etc., were moved at the Conference. This led to heated controversy, since the Gandhian right-wing leaders of the Congress stoutly opposed all these resolutions. That controversy at the end of which the leftist resolutions were adopted by a majority vote was characteristic of the subsequent years; the entire Congress organisation in Malabar was the arena of a fierce struggle between the right and the left-wings in which the left-wing was stronger than the right.

The left-wing however did not confine itself to activities within the Congress. While working inside the Congress to bring about radical changes in the programme and methods of work of the organisation, it also carried on independent work of agitation, propaganda and organisation among workers, peasants, students, teachers, etc.

For the first time in the history of Malabar, Trade Unions started functioning in all the industrial towns: these were, all of them, led by one or other of the organisers of the newly-formed Socialist group in the Congress. Systematic co-ordination was organised between the Socialist-led Congress Committees (beginning with the Provincial Congress Committee itself) and the Trade Unions. The 1934-35 strike wave among the industrial workers was thus led and organised in such a way as not only to set up industrial trade unions but to link up their day-to-day activities with the agitation, propaganda and organisation for rallying the working class for the anti-imperialist united front.

So too was work among the peasants started. A basis for work among the peasantry was laid with a critique of the Malabar Tenancy Act passed in 1930 and demands for amendments to it. It has already been mentioned that the early Tenancy Movement was concerned more with the demands of the kanamdaras who are a privileged minority among tenants than with the demands of all tenants. The Tenancy Act that was passed in 1930 therefore did not give any real relief to the majority of tenants; the fixity of tenure granted to Verumpattamdaras was so conditional, and the rate of "fair rent" fixed for them was so high, that their position remained more or less the same as before. The demand was therefore formulated that all tenants including Verumpattamdaras should get full and real fixity of tenure, that the rate of "fair rent" should be reduced and that other changes should be made in the pro-

visions of the Act. Malabar, Taluk and Local Peasant Conferences were held to formulate these and other demands and Peasant Organisations of District, Taluk and Local levels were formed. The Socialist-led Congress Committees and Congress Conferences also lent support to these demands. Thus was brought about that co-ordination of the independent class organisations of the peasantry with Congress Committees which laid the basis for a real anti-imperialist united front with the peasantry as its main driving force.

One other class organisation that was characteristically part of the anti-imperialist movement of the period was the Teachers' Union. This was the organisation of teachers in Aided Elementary Schools—a type of schools in which the teachers are literally at the mercy of the management. Living Wage, Security of Service and other demands of these teachers became the slogans that linked the industrial workers in the towns with the peasants in the villages. For, coming as they did out of the peasant class, these teachers had a real interest in the amendment of the Tenancy Act and other peasant demands; at the same time, being subjected to the same type of exploitation as the industrial worker (wage-labour), they were equally interested in the demands, struggles and organisations of the industrial working class. The Aided Elementary School Teachers' Union therefore took more or less the same organisational form and adopted the same forms of struggle (strike) as the working class while, being the most enlightened section of the rural poor, they provided the most active and most capable cadre for building up the peasants' organisations. In fact, it was the combination in one and the same person of the office bearer of the Village Congress Committee, the leader of the Teachers' Union and the organiser of the Kisan Sangham that made the anti-imperialist movement strike deep roots in the countryside.

It was these mass organisations, together with student and youth organisations, reading rooms, night schools, etc. that helped the leftists in the Congress in their struggle against the right. For, whatever manipulations the right-wing Congressmen might carry on at the top, they could not do anything below. The new constitution of the Congress, enforced in 1935, with its restrictions on the number of members of the K.P.C.C. and with various provisions like the Manual Labour Clause, enabled the rightists to capture the KPCC. Lower Committees like the District Congress Committee as

well as most of the Taluk and Village Committees, however, remained under the control of the leftists, so that these Congress Committees became another forum to ventilate the class demands of the toilers as well as another training ground to get active cadres from the working class and peasantry.

The right-wing leadership resisted this type of revolutionary activity. With the majority that they manipulated in the K.P.C.C. when the 1935 constitution of the Congress came into force, they dissolved several District, Taluk and Local Congress Committees and suspended some Congress organisers in 1936. They were deliberately provoking a split in the organisation, since it was only through a split that they could dominate the Congress. But the approaching general elections to the Provincial Legislatures under the new constitution, together with the fact that all the active and selfless cadres of the Congress belonged to the left, made the Congress President and the Working Committee revoke these disciplinary actions. And, by the time the elections were over, the position of the leftists had become so strong that the K.P.C.C. itself came under their leadership.

A big and decisive factor in this last development—the restoration of the leftist majority in the K. P. C. C.—was the close co-operation between the Nationalist Muslims and the Socialist-led Congress of Malabar. It has already been mentioned that the Congress in the post-1921 period was virtually split into two—a Hindu group and a Muslim group. Muslim Congressmen had, for some time after the 1930-32 struggles, even kept themselves out of active political work. The emergence of the Socialist-led leftists as a definite group fighting the rightwing gave hope to these Nationalist Muslims who began to work in close co-operation with them. It was this alliance between the Socialist-led Congressmen and Nationalist Muslims that helped the reduction of the rightists into a minority in the K.P.C.C.; it was again this that took the Kisan and Teachers' Movement into the Muslim-majority areas of Malabar.

The emergence of a K.P.C.C. with a majority of Socialist-led lefts and Nationalist Muslims carried the mass movement several steps forward. The gigantic political campaigning of the period of general elections, followed by the enthusiasm roused by the formation of the Congress Ministry, did of course lead to a tremendous mass upsurge; the Trade Unions, Kisan Sabhas, Students' Unions, Teachers' Unions etc., grew up as

never before in the latter half of 1937, the Trade Union Demands Declaration Day (Sept. 19, 1937) being the day of the biggest rally of the working class in Calicut and Cannanore. It was however after January 1938 (the date when the K.P.C.C. came under leftist leadership) that the Congress in Malabar became a real organ of people's struggles. For, one of the first things that the new, Socialist-led, K. P. C. C. did was to organise Provincial, District, Taluk and Village Volunteer Camps through which, in the course of a year, nearly 3000 volunteers were given physical and political training. These 3000 volunteers, with Taluk and District captains, formed the backbone of the 500 or so Village and Taluk Congress Committees for the regular functioning of which systematic organisational steps were taken by the K. P. C. C.

It was this unprecedented organisational work that roused the peasantry of N. Malabar, gave them confidence in their own organised strength and led them towards the first mass peasant struggle in the history of Malabar—the 1938-39 campaign against feudal levies. That campaign was so strong that the landlords and bureaucrats raised the cry of "anarchy". And "anarchy" it was to those who wanted to maintain feudal domination intact; for, not only did the peasants withhold the payment of rent for the season, winter 1938-39, till a solution was found to the question of feudal levies; they also resorted to that traditional weapon of the peasantry—social boycott—against the landlords and their stooges. This act of the peasantry so enraged the landlords, bureaucrats and right wing Congressmen that they demanded prompt punitive action against the peasants. The K. P. C. C. and lower Congress Committees however declared themselves on the side of the fighting peasants and urged upon the Congress Ministry to bring about an amicable settlement. The result was that, on the one hand, the Congress Ministry appointed a Committee to go into the question of amending the existing Tenancy Act while the leaders of the Kisan movement advised the peasants to pay rent to the landlords. The latter however were forced to drop the demand for feudal levies.

The Congress organisation in Malabar in 1938-39 was thus a model of an anti-imperialist united front in action. On the one hand, it helped the working class and its allies in revolutionary struggle—the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie—to organise themselves and their struggles; on the other hand, it rallied all these revolutionary classes and their orga-

nisations behind the common slogans of the anti-imperialist movement. It however roused the anger of the right-wing Congressmen who lost no opportunity to run down this Congress organisation. They went so far as to non-cooperate with the Congress organisation in the 1940 election to the District Board resulting in the defeat of several Congress candidates. Since however the new District Board had a majority of Congressmen with a few Socialists also in it, the Advisers' Regime that came to power at the end of 1939 took the first opportunity to dissolve it.

It is significant that, while the Advisers' Regime dissolved the District Board in which Socialist-led leftists shared power, the Congress Working Committee in its turn dissolved the K.P.C.C. itself. A Socialist-led Congress organisation even in a corner of the country was a hindrance to the carrying out out of the anti-struggle (individual Satyagraha) line which the Congress leadership was then pursuing. With this dissolution of the Socialist-led K.P.C.C. and with the intense war-time repression against the leftists, the internal struggle between the rightists and leftists in the Congress took a new turn.

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The emergence of the working class and socialist movement began earlier in the States part of Kerala than in Malabar. Apart from the Alleppey Labour Union whose formation and adoption of a resolution advocating responsible government have already been referred to, there was the Karshaka Thozhilali (Peasant and Worker) Movement in Cranganore in 1933. This was a movement demanding the scaling down of agrarian debts and took the form of mass satyagraha. A Communist League was also formed in Trivandrum in 1931-32. Hence, when the trade union and socialist movements came to be organised in 1934-35 on an all-Kerala scale, they were not confined to Malabar, but unlike the earlier Congress movement, were really all-Kerala movements. Trade unions and socialist groups were also formed in Trichur, Cochin and other industrial centres of Cochin and Travancore while the Alleppey Trade Union came to be linked with the all-Kerala movement.

One of the major activities of these Socialist groups was

to work inside the democratic movement for responsible government and, to this end, agitate for the reversal of the Congress policy of "non-interference in the internal affairs of Indian States". Cochin and Travancore Political Conferences were held in 1937 which urged on the Congress Working Committee to allow the Congress organisation in the States to carry on political activity and not confine itself to "constructive work." When, however, the Haripura Congress adopted its well-known resolution on the formation of independent States peoples' organisations in the States, an organisation called the Cochin Congress was formed in Cochin, while the leaders and organisers of the Joint Political Congress in Travancore formed, together with other national democratic politicians, the Travancore State Congress. Both had, as their central slogan, responsible government under the Maharaja.

The course of development of these two organisations was different because the policies pursued by the two Governments differed. The Government of Travancore headed by Dewan Ramaswamy Iyer made it clear that it would not allow any agitation for responsible government as that slogan was a challenge to the authority of the Maharaja. The State Congress therefore came to clash with the Government within a few weeks of its formation and had to start a Civil Disobedience Movement within 6 months. The Government of Cochin took a different attitude and declared that it had no objection to responsible government and that, on the other hand, responsible government was its own goal. Since, however, that goal could not be reached in one leap, said the Government, it was introducing an instalment of constitutional reforms, widening the franchise and transferring one department—the department of Rural Development—into the hands of an elected and responsible minister. This gave a handle to the rightist leaders of the Cochin Congress to sabotage the development of the organisation on militant lines. They decided to accept the new instalment of reforms, made their representative accept the ministership and then began to co-operate with the Government.

Though, because of the open hostility of the Government of Travancore to any movement with responsible government as its aim, the leadership of the Travancore State Congress could not pursue such an avowedly compromising policy, they too did their utmost to avoid direct mass action to enforce the democratic demand. It was the Socialist-led Youth

League which took the initiative in starting direct action; the State Congress Working Committee had to follow suit.

Thus was started that glorious mass action which is known as the 1938 State Congress Struggle, a struggle that was far more extensive than the 1921 Malabar movement; for, while the latter was confined to certain Taluks of Malabar, the 1938 Travancore movement embraced the whole State of Travancore. The main difference between the 1921 Malabar movement and the 1938 Travancore movement however consisted in the qualitatively higher character of the latter. For, one of the characteristic features of the Travancore struggle was the part played by the working class of Alleppey under the leadership of the Socialist Party.

The 20,000 and more coir workers not only of the town of Alleppey but of the 2 Taluks of Ambalapuzha and Shertalai declared a General Strike not only to enforce their own partial economic demands but also to express solidarity with the State Congress demand for responsible government. The strike was so magnificently conducted that, for days together, Alleppey town and the surrounding industrial belt were in the hands of the workers. The one-lakh strong rally at Alleppey on October 23, 1938, the militant resistance offered by the workers to the police, the firing that followed it and the arrest of over 500 leading cadres of the Union—these were the first baptism of fire for the working class, the precursor of the still bigger and still more glorious action of 8 years later—the famous Punnapra-Vayalar of 1946. And it was the conscious and effective leadership given to this strike action by the Socialist leadership, and particularly Com. P. Krishna Pillai who personally organised the strike, that won the confidence of the Alleppey working class for the Socialist Party.

Together with the working class of Alleppey and the surrounding industrial belt also came into action the mass of students all over Travancore, even in the most remote corners of the State. The magnificent strikes and demonstrations of students in colleges, high schools and even elementary schools were a sight unprecedented in the history of Kerala. Here was a repetition of what has taken place in many colonial and semi-colonial countries—demonstrating the ability of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly students, to play, on occasions, the role of the vanguard of the democratic movement. There is no doubt that, next only to the General Strike of the Alle-

pey working class, the State-wide student actions shook the State machinery to its foundations.

Though not on such a wide, all-State basis and hence insufficiently noticed by the State Congress leadership, peasants also came into action with their own forms of struggle. For, just as in the 1921 Malabar rebellion, so in certain localities of Travancore, peasants prepared themselves to resist the military forces if they came and, to this end, started cutting lines of communication. It is worth mentioning that the first persons to be executed on charges of waging war against the State in Kerala after the 1921 rebellion were the leaders of this movement which was however confined to a few villages.

The most significant feature of the 1938 Travancore struggle was the fact that the all-Kerala Socialist leadership gave direct organisational assistance to it. Not only did Com. Krishna Pillai personally organise the Alleppey strike but he himself and other all-Kerala leaders of the Socialist Party were the brains behind the underground activities of the State Congress. Socialist cadres from all over Kerala were sent to Travancore to assist in the organisation and regular functioning of the illegal apparatus of the State Congress. Above all, the two jathas which marched from Malabar to Travancore, particularly the first under the leadership of Com. A. K. Gopalan, electrified the whole country. Thus was born in action that unity of the democratic movement of Kerala—that too under the leadership of the working class and socialist movements—which was later to form the basis of the struggle for a democratic United Kerala.

All these features of the struggle in Travancore created as much panic in the bourgeois leadership of the all-India national movement as in the Government headed by Sir C. P. As in the case of other militant mass actions, Gandhiji found in the State Congress a "deplorable" element of "violence"; he objected to the fact that the State Congress leadership denounced not the Government in general but the head of that Government, Sir C.P., personally. He said it was wrong on the part of the State Congress leadership to have submitted a memorandum to the Central Government exposing the misdeeds of Sir C. P. and "advised" the State Congress leadership to withdraw it. Since the penalty for non-compliance of the State Congress to this "advice" would be withdrawal of the moral support of the all-India leadership to the State Congress struggle, the Working Committee of the State

Congress was forced to withdraw the memorandum. And this was the end of the great 1938 upsurge, since the people took this action as nothing but surrender to the Government.

There was however intense dissatisfaction among the rank and file at this surrender. This discontent expressed itself in the formation of a definite left-wing inside the State Congress—what was then called the Radical Group. Furthermore, the Youth League which had initiated the 1938 struggle reconsidered the entire political situation and decided to start a new struggle, the open reading of the withdrawn memorandum being the initial form of struggle. This received tremendous support from the people and even from a section of the State Congress leadership which, though forced to comply with Gandhiji's "advice", was at heart opposed to the withdrawal of the memorandum. However it could not acquire the mass national character of the earlier struggle since it was conducted by only a section of the national movement.

This second struggle may be said to mark the beginning of the same struggle between Left and Right in the Travancore State Congress as the formation of the Socialist Party in 1934 did in Malabar. For, the Socialist groups that had been functioning in Travancore till then were confined to certain towns and had become a major political force only in the industrial belt surrounding Alleppey. The 1939 struggle of the Youth League and the formation of the Radical Group however led to the transformation of left and socialist groups into a national political force, some of the best-known State Congress leaders (like Coms. K. C. George, M. N. Govindan Nair, P. T. Punnoose, Srikantan Nair, etc.) being the leaders of the left and socialist movements.

Left and Socialist forces were also developing in Cochin. For, though the 1938 instalment of constitutional reforms and its acceptance by the Cochin Congress successfully diverted the national movement towards constitutional channels, discontent also began to express itself in Cochin. The Socialists and other discontented democrats began to grope for an alternative to the Cochin Congress and organised the Cochin State Praja Mandalam. They also took up the question of agrarian reforms, formulated the demands of tenants in connection with the Tenancy Act in force and organised a State-wide jatha to popularise these demands. Out of this campaign arose the first independent class organisation of the peasantry in Cochin—the Cochin State Karshaka Sabha. The demands

formulated and the type of organisation formed were more or less on the lines of what was done in Malabar. It was the organisers of the Praja Mandalam and Karshaka Sabha that organised the 1941 defiance of the ban on a conference at a time when the leaders of the Cochin Congress were co-operating with the Government in its "war effort."

The national upsurge of the nineteen thirties and the role played in it by the working class and socialist movements were thus on a really all-Kerala scale. For, though the form in which and the intensity with which they manifested themselves were different as between Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, they did not remain localised as the political national movement of the twenties did. A really all-Kerala national democratic movement with a really all-Kerala leadership was thus slowly emerging. And it was the organised working class guided by socialist ideology that was standing at the head of this movement.

(3)

The main source of strength of the national upsurge of the nineteen thirties was, as will be clear from the above, the fact that the new forces of the working class and the socialist movements were deeply rooted in the general democratic movement. It was because the first generation of socialists arose from the ranks of the national democrats, because socialism was to them a natural and logical development of revolutionary democracy, that they could successfully link up the class struggle of the industrial proletariat and its allies with the national struggle of the entire people.

This however was at the same time the great shortcoming of our working class and Socialist movements as well as the revolutionary democratic movement under their leadership. For, this meant that the various socialist groups in Kerala that were united under the banner of Congress Socialism and the class movements that were growing under this Socialist leadership had not yet completely freed themselves from the ideological influence of the national bourgeoisie that was heading the National Movement. The Socialist cadres that were reared in Kerala had not carried on that struggle against the bourgeoisie and its ideology, Gandhism, which would

alone have given them the proletarian class outlook towards the various problems they had to tackle.

We have seen that socialism came to Kerala as a movement within the Congress, as a party of Socialists working inside the Congress. This meant that the approach of our Socialists was essentially that of Congressmen, extreme vacillation manifesting itself in them on all those occasions when a firm fight had to be put up against the bourgeois leadership of the Congress. This does not of course mean that they did not put up a fight against the leadership of the Congress, as Congressmen, inside the Congress; this, of course, they did and that was why they could build up the Congress itself on progressive democratic lines. This struggle inside the Congress however was so circumscribed by the anxiety to preserve the internal unity of the Congress as an organisation, that they failed to carry on a determined ideological struggle against Gandhism.

The clearest example of this anxiety to preserve the internal unity of the national organisation was seen in 1939-40 when the Socialist leadership advised the Travancore Youth League to withdraw the second Civil Disobedience Movement which, as stated earlier, was started as a protest against the directive of Gandhiji that the anti-Dewan memorandum should be withdrawn. The Socialist leadership was more anxious to maintain the unity of the national movement against the common enemy than to organise the discontent growing in the ranks of State Congressmen and form a definite left wing.

This attitude of loyalty to the bourgeois leadership of the national movement affected socialist work in the mass organisations as well. The trade unions, kisan sanghams and other mass organisations that they built up were independent only in an economic sense, in the sense that, so long as it was a question of fighting economic battles, they acted independently of the Congress. In fighting political battles, they did not come out as independent mass organisations. It is to be noted that the only example of a political general strike of the working class in Kerala in the years before the Second World War was the 1938 Alleppey strike organised in support of the State Congress struggle. As for the peasantry, not only did the Kisan Sangham fail to fight any political battles, but the very understanding of the Socialist leadership on the agrarian question was that the abolition of landlordism was a programme to be implemented only after independence was established, the immediate perspective being one of only fighting partial strug-

gles to secure partial demands. In other words, working class and peasant organisations were looked upon not as mass political organisations operating independently of, and if necessary in opposition to, the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, but as the vehicles through which the workers and peasants are mobilised behind that leadership.

The ideological root of this trailing behind the bourgeoisie was the failure to see the crucial role played by the peasantry in the national revolution; the failure to see that agrarian revolution is the axle around which the wheel of national revolution turns; that it is the working class alone headed by the Communist Party that can successfully lead the agrarian revolution and hence the national revolution. Failure to see these basic elements of the strategy of Marxism-Leninism as applied to colonial revolutions made our Socialists look upon the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie as the leader and decisive force in the revolution, all talk of the leading role of the working class being merely formal.

It should nevertheless be mentioned that, in spite of the grave shortcoming which this wrong approach to the strategy of revolution constituted in the further development of the working class and socialist movement, it did not for the movement do much harm. For, what was needed at that time was that independent class organisations should be built up, that the working class and peasantry should be brought into the anti-imperialist movement and that the left and socialist wing should be organised as a force against the right wing in the Congress. These tasks of the moment were, in the main, fulfilled, though it is indisputable that the correct approach to the strategy of revolution would have helped the better fulfilment of these tasks themselves.

The biggest asset of the pre-Second-World-War socialist movement in Kerala was that, unlike the top right-wing leadership of the Congress Socialist Party, it was sincerely pro-Soviet and pro-Communist. As a matter of fact, it was the grand achievements of the First Five-Year Plan in the midst of the most severe economic crisis in the capitalist world that attracted the working class and petty bourgeoisie of Kerala to the side of socialism. It was therefore unthinkable for the young socialist groups of Kerala to go anti-Soviet as the Massanis and Mehtas went. The result was that, as the internal struggle inside the Congress Socialist Party developed more and more intensively, the entire socialist ranks in Kerala sup-

ported the pro-Soviet and pro-Communist left-wing as against the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist right-wing. Furthermore, a definite Communist nucleus was formed in Kerala in 1937 composed of some of the topmost provincial leaders of the Congress Socialist Party. The work of this group in the years 1938-39, together with the clash of Communist and Socialist policies following the outbreak of the Second World War, resulted in the wholesale transformation in 1940 of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala into the Communist Party.

With this ends one phase of the history of the working class and socialist movement, the phase in which these movements remained more or less inside the bourgeois national movement. It was only after the formation, in 1940, of the Kerala and lower committees of the Communist Party, only after an illegal apparatus was set up to carry on the work of the Party, that the socialists of Kerala ceased to look upon the Congress as the central organisation through which they had to carry on their political activities. Since this organisational demarcation from the Congress arose out of a political situation in which a clash of policies had started between the Communists and the Congress on the issue of India's attitude to war, this may be considered the beginning of a phase in which the working class and its political party started an open ideological and practical struggle against the bourgeoisie and its leadership.

(4)

The months immediately following the outbreak of the Second World War saw an intensification of the struggle between the Left and the Right inside the Congress. The Left came out with a declaration that the war was an imperialist war and that therefore India should have nothing to do with it. The Right on the other hand said that the war was an imperialist war since Britain had not accepted the independence of India, thus implying that it would cease to be an imperialist war provided India's status as an independent nation was accepted by Britain. From these conflicting characterisations of the war arose conflicting tactics—the Leftist tactics of *unconditional resistance to an inherently unjust war* and the Rightist tactics of *supporting that unjust war on conditions*, or rather

the tactics respectively of intensification of the mass struggle against imperialism and of bargaining with imperialism.

This struggle between the Left and the Right was, in Kerala, not merely a continuation of what had been taking place in the pre-war years, a struggle between two groups inside the Congress. It was a struggle between the bourgeois leadership of the national movement on the one hand and the Communist Party that was just coming out as an independent political party on the other. It meant further the adoption of certain forms of organisation and methods of struggle that were never before known to the people of Kerala.

It was in January-February 1940 that at a series of meetings of the Congress Socialists it was decided that the Congress Socialist Party should be transformed into the Communist Party and that efforts should be made to implement the revolutionary plan of action chalked out by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India in its well-known document, *The Proletarian Path*. This decision was naturally followed by the decision to set up the illegal apparatus of the Party not only because the Communist Party was a party under ban but also because Government had already started repression. Dozens of cases had already been registered against leftists for having carried on anti-war and seditious propaganda and many were already in jail. It was therefore thought necessary to preserve the minimum cadre and make the necessary arrangements for the continuous functioning of the Party organisation. That this organisation functioned for over 2 years—from the beginning of 1940 to July 1942 when the ban on the Party was removed—was a new experience for the people, and Communists themselves, of Kerala.

In the beginning of this activity however the Communists were in a peculiar position: they were, on the one hand, an independent political party functioning illegally and fighting the official policy of the Congress while, on the other hand, they were the leaders of the provincial, district and lower units of the Congress organisation. They had, on the one hand, to popularise the independent revolutionary political line of the Communist Party and, on the other, to keep, as Congressmen, within the limits set by the rules of Satyagraha laid down by Gandhiji. This conflict between their position as Communists on the one hand and as Congressmen on the other led to the call issued by them as Congressmen to celebrate an anti-repression day (September 15, 1940) and to the organisation of

militant resistance to the police on that day, organised by them as Communists. It was out of this militant action that the well-known Morazha and Mattannur cases arose leading to the sentence of death on Com. K. P. R. Gopalan. It was in the course of this action that two young Comrades, Aboo and Chathukutty, laid down their lives. That day was therefore the first occasion on which militant resistance to the police was consciously organised by a political party as against the hitherto spontaneous resistance of the people.

This action therefore enraged the Government as well as the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. While the former unleashed a reign of terror in all areas where Communists were strong, the latter dissolved the K.P.C.C. and other Congress Committees that had a majority of Communist-led leftists. The Communists had therefore necessarily to strengthen their illegal organisation and to come out before the people as an independent political party. That they did this successfully for nearly two years—October 1940 to July 1942—evoked the admiration of all genuine anti-imperialists in the province who began to look upon the Communist Party as the leader of the anti-imperialist movement. It was in fact during this period of illegality that the Communist Party, as a political party (and not merely as a group of good and hardworking Congressmen), became the leader of the anti-imperialist movement.

Meanwhile, however, the character of the war had changed: on June 22, 1941, the war ceased to be an attempt of antagonistic imperialist groups to re-partition the world among themselves, but a war to decide the future of the Soviet Union and through it of world socialism. Since however this change in the character of the war was of such a type as could be seen only by the class conscious representatives of the proletariat, it led to a very complicated situation. The genuinely-left petty bourgeoisie was of course sympathetic towards the Soviet Union but could not, on that account alone, see any transformation in the character of the war so long as Britain continued to rule our country. The advanced elements among the working class, on the other hand, felt that nothing should be left undone to defend the Land of Socialism. It was naturally the latter stand that the Indian Communists, after an initial leaning towards the former, took in 1942 when they declared that, with the entry of the Soviet Union as one of the contestants, the war had become a People's War.

This made a basic change in the alignment of forces inside the national democratic movement in Kerala. For, the undisputed position of leadership over all genuine anti-imperialists which the Communists had enjoyed till 1942 was shaken. The right-wing bourgeois leadership of the national movement, which had always appeared to the rank and file anti-imperialists as compromising, now assumed the role of uncompromising fighters against imperialism, engaged in a last-ditch battle with the enemy; while the Communists who had always been regarded to be the best fighters appeared as compromisers. The hitherto solid unity of the left elements was thus broken, a section of the leftists allying themselves with the right-wing Congressmen. Anti-Communism became the hallmark not only of the right-wing but sections of the left also. A new generation of anti-imperialists grew who genuinely believed that the Communist Party was a paid agent of British Imperialism.

This development had disastrous consequences for the working class and other mass organisations. The hitherto solid unity of trade unions, student organisations, etc. was broken. For the first time in the history of our working-class movement, a bourgeois-led trade union movement, the National Labour Union, came into being. So also did the Students' Congress begin to grow as rival to the Students' Federation. On a far smaller scale than these two, and only in certain localities, the Peasants' Congress also started growing. Rival organisations of every section of the people—this became the slogan of the anti-Communist section of the national movement.

The same thing happened to the socialist movement. There had, till 1942, been no anti-Soviet, anti-Communist bias inside the socialist movement in Kerala, thanks to the genuinely socialist convictions of the first generation of socialists in Kerala. This was why not a single member of the Socialist Party of Kerala dissented when it decided, in 1940, to transform itself into the Communist Party. But the apparent conflict in 1942 between loyalty to the international proletariat and loyalty to our anti-imperialist movement created a new generation of socialists in Kerala who were as anti-Soviet and anti-Communist as the Masanis and Mehtas.

This was a very significant development because it showed that the apparent unity of the Congress contained within itself the seeds of future crisis. The desire to develop the national movement in the direction of socialism was as genuine for this

generation of socialists as hatred for the Communists who were standing in the way of what appeared to them to be the final struggle against imperialism. Hence, as it began to become clearer and clearer, as days passed, that the right-wing leaders were trying to come to an agreement with imperialism, the new, 1942, generation of socialists began to get disillusioned regarding their right-wing allies. This, as we shall see, was what led to the subsequent radicalisation of the socialist ranks, to the formation of the Kerala Socialist Party and Revolutionary Socialist Party and to the possibility of a united front between them and the Communists.

Another factor complicating the political situation was the growth of the Muslim League as a major political force. Not since the days of 1920-21 was there such an awakening among the Muslims as in the war years; but, while in 1921 the Muslim masses were rallied behind the Congress, they were now rallied against the Congress. Since the rallying of any section of the masses against the Congress was, in the eyes of Congressmen and anti-Communist leftists, a rallying of reactionary forces, they looked upon the masses behind the Muslim League as as much a reactionary force as the League leadership. The opposition of the Communists to this attitude towards the Muslim League, their advocacy of the slogan of Congress-League unity, was another reason for the anti-Communist prejudice inside the anti-imperialist movement.

So complicated a political situation as this required a high degree of political maturity on the part of the Communist Party. For, it was a question of linking up the national anti-imperialist tasks of the Indian proletariat with its international tasks. It was again a question of fighting the pro-fascist sentiments growing among the anti-imperialist masses in such a way that, while it effectively exposed the conscious fascist agents, it won over the majority of anti-imperialists. It was moreover a question of so working among the Muslim and non-Muslim masses as to help both to see the anti-democratic character of the stand taken by the leadership of both the Congress as well as the Muslim League. It was, above all, a question of preserving and extending the unity of the trade unions, kisan sabhas, student organisations, etc., in such a way that the day-to-day demands of the mass of the people were secured without resorting to such forms of struggle as would help the conscious fascist agents.

There is no doubt that the Communist Party failed to show such a high degree of political maturity. Various mistakes were no doubt committed in assessing the anti-imperialist content of the 1942 upsurge, in evaluating the significance of the birth of socialist and left elements in the wake of that struggle, in the understanding of the role of the Muslim League and its slogan of Pakistan and in the tactics of struggle on the working class and other mass fronts. The essence of these mistakes consisted, no doubt, in the under-estimation of the national factor in working out the tactics of revolution, in the failure to realise that the Communists in a colonial country can fulfil their class tasks only if they take proper account of the fact that national aspirations are the decisive political factor in a colonial country.

The main point however is not that these mistakes were committed and that the Party in consequence got temporarily isolated from the non-party mass of anti-imperialists. The main and decisive point is that, in the first major political conflict with the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, the Communist Party took its international and class tasks as the axis of its political activity. It required a tremendous amount of political conviction and courage to swim against the current of national sentiment and openly take the international task as the main task. This was particularly so for the Communists of Kerala who, as we have seen, grew inside the national movement and hence carried with them innumerable remnants of bourgeois nationalism. And yet they carried out this part of their task as a united party; all the fervent hopes cherished by the opponents of the Party, that it would either be forced to give up its slogan of People's War or would get disrupted, were dashed to pieces.

This however was not all. It was precisely during the 1942-45 period, when it had to contend against blind prejudice on the part of the majority of genuine anti-imperialists that the Party grew into a mass political party. The weekly organ that the Party started in 1942 very soon got the status of the best-circulated political weekly in the Malayalam language. The successive calls for Party funds received a magnificent response, the amount collected in the 1942-45 period being over Rupees three lakhs. By every criterion of the organisational strength of any political party—such as funds collected from the people, the number as well as the quality of work of whole-

time and part-time cadres, the circulation of the Party organ, the average sale of political pamphlets and other publications etc.—the Party created epoch-making records.

The main reason for this advance in the political influence and organisational strength of the Party was that, though its slogans on the national-political plane ran counter to the sentiments of a majority of anti-imperialists, its practical day-to-day activity was eminently fitted to the needs of the people. For, the Party took up all those issues that affected the daily lives of the common people such as food, cloth, sugar, kerosene, etc. Not only did the Party agitate for people's solutions of these problems of the people's lives, it also organised the people in Food Committees, Grow More Food Committees, etc. Through these activities as well as through the functioning of trade unions and kisan sanghams, the Party sought to solve many immediate problems of the people. It was because of these activities that, at the very time when mass organisations were being disrupted with the formation of 'national' trade unions and students' congresses as well as Muslim labour unions and Muslim students' federations, the number of mass organisations under Communist leadership and their mass membership grew as never before. The Party's efforts in the direction of developing a people's culture, a culture in the service of the people, also led to a tremendous enrichment of the literary, artistic, and scientific heritage of our people, thus drawing a vast number of men and women of culture towards the Party.

A significant step taken by the Communist Party in the 1942-45 period was the formulation of the slogan of United Kerala. This was of course formally accepted ever since the Indian National Congress accepted the principle of linguistic provinces in its own constitution and made the Malayalam-speaking areas into a separate Kerala Province. But the fact that the major part of Kerala lies in the two Indian States of Cochin and Travancore, into whose "internal affairs" the Congress was prohibited from "interfering", made the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee a virtually Malabar Congress Committee. That was why, even when the Travancore State Congress and the Cochin Praja Mandalam brought these two states into the realm of active struggle for democracy, the national movement under bourgeois leadership remained split in three parts. It was the emergence of the socialist movement and its transformation into the Communist Party that

created an all-Kerala political party, an all-Kerala political leadership.

The Party however did not remain satisfied with this practical unification of the democratic movement throughout Kerala, but, through a series of articles and pamphlets, raised the programmatic slogan of uniting all the homogeneous Malayalam-speaking-majority areas of the Madras Presidency and the States of Cochin and Travancore into one province without any of the maharajas. This, as we shall see subsequently, was a slogan which caught the imagination of the people and created a very powerful mass movement for democracy.

Let us however state in anticipation that it was the Communist Party alone that gave an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal content to this slogan. For, it was the Communist Party alone that declared (1) that the struggle for United Kerala is an indivisible part of the struggle of the people of India for the ending of imperialist rule; (2) that the struggle for United Kerala is also a struggle for ending princely rule and other remnants of feudalism, a struggle for the introduction of full and genuine democracy for the people; (3) that the boundaries of United Kerala are to be so drawn up that all those contiguous areas of Madras, Travancore and Cochin wherein the Malayalam-speaking people are in a majority shall be included, the rest going to neighbouring national area provinces; (4) that, the struggle for United Kerala being the struggle for democracy, the common people of Kerala, in alliance with their brethren in the neighbouring nationalities, are the decisive forces in that struggle. It was these basic premises of a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the national question in Kerala that enabled the Party to carry on an ideological struggle against the various disruptive slogans advanced by the feudal, bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties with regard to United Kerala.

(5)

Just as, in 1934, the people dashed the hopes of Lord Willingdon of seeing the Congress defeated at the polls, so too did the people in 1946 dash the hopes of Congress leaders of seeing the Communist Party suffer an ignominious defeat. In spite of the slogan which Nehru himself raised: "The Com-

munists were on the other side in 1942", in spite of the vigorous offensive, political as well as physical, launched by the Congress, the Socialist Party and others against the Party in the name of 1942, the I.N.A., Netaji, etc., a sizable section of the electorate voted Communist in all those areas where the Communists had become a force. It is true that they secured very few seats in the Legislatures; the few they got were only in special Labour Constituencies and not in General Constituencies. But the number of voters who braved the political and physical offensive of other parties and expressed confidence in the Communist Party was an indication that the Communists had grown stronger and not weaker because of the bold independent stand they took in 1942-45.

So far as Malabar was concerned, the Communists fought the Congress in 5 General Constituencies which together constituted 2/3 of Malabar. The votes polled by them for these 5 seats together represented 25 per cent, the percentage in one of these (Chirakkal) going as high as 44 per cent. Considering the heavy odds they had to contend with in fighting the Congress with its appeal to the traditions of 1942, this 25 per cent poll was indeed a creditable record.

The main thing however was not the size of the pro-Communist electorate but its political quality. For, the 25 per cent of voters who recorded their votes in favour of the Communists were not merely voters exercising their franchise but the vanguard of a new round of mass political actions—strikes, kisan struggles, student struggles, etc. Though the Congress secured an overwhelming majority in the Provincial Legislature, it had to face not only a gigantic people's movement for the satisfaction of immediate demands but also a determined struggle to smash imperialism. And it was the Congress and not the Communists who were going to join "the other side" in these struggles. The 25 per cent votes polled by the Communists in Malabar, together with similar votes polled by them in other parts of India, were an index of the Communist leadership in this post-war revolutionary upsurge.

Within a few months of the General Elections of 1946, the workers of the South Indian Railway Labour Union launched their glorious General Strike. Along with other parts of the Madras Presidency, Malabar participated in this. Not only did the railway workers of Malabar stand solidly behind the strike leadership; other sections of the workers and the general public also came out in solidarity actions in support of the

strike. This was followed by the strike actions of the Municipal Workers, Beedi and Cigar Workers, etc.

Peasants too came into action; their campaign for the right to cultivate fallow lands and to retain their own food requirements before complying with the demands of the Government's Procurement Officials, was the first large-scale militant mass action of the peasantry in Malabar. Police and M.S.P. terror of unprecedented magnitude was unleashed by the Congress Ministry to crush this wave of struggle. The Congress Government resorted also to that method of repression against the Communists, the leaders of these struggles, which had been universally condemned when resorted to by the British—detention without trial.

This round of struggles had far more of a mass character in Travancore than in Malabar. For, while the struggle in Malabar had the appearance of the Communists trying to create trouble for the Congress Government which had the support of the majority of the people; while, therefore, there was a section of the people who were as firmly ranged against, as another behind, these struggles, the struggles in Travancore were clearly directed against the universally hated Government of Dewan Ramaswamy Iyer. The labour strikes, food rallies, student actions and other mass actions in Travancore were launched in the midst of a political situation in which two slogans echoed throughout the State: "Down with the American Model" (the reference here is to the new constitution modelled on the American, presidential, type of executive as opposed to the British, parliamentary, executive) and "End the Dewan Rule". The Communists being the most determined fighters against the American Model and Dewan Rule, there was perfect cooperation between them and the mass of Congressmen including a section of the Congress leadership itself.

There was however one section of the Congress leadership in Travancore which grew as panicky at this new round of struggles as the Government. They could not, of course, openly support the Government since the latter was as unbending as ever in its opposition to Responsible Government. They were however prepared to accept the new constitutional proposals of the Government provided some slight changes were made in them. Nay more, they were totally opposed to the launching of any mass action against these proposals. The Government naturally tried to utilise this section to neu-

tralise the entire Congress leadership and in order to isolate and crush the vanguard, the working class led by the Communist Party and then to crush all opposition.

That the Government succeeded in this for the time being is shown by the fact that, when the Government raised the slogan of "Communist violence and anarchy", the right-wing leadership of the Congress tacitly agreed with them. The concentration of the Government's armed forces in the Ambalapuzha and Shertalai Taluks, the organisation under their auspices of landlords' goondas in the villages of the area, the series of arrests and other repressive actions resorted to by them—all this did not rouse the indignation of the State Congress leadership. But, when the working class under Communist leadership took defensive measures to meet this offensive, they denounced it as "violence" and virtually supported the Government's declaration of Martial Law. It was not the brutal firing and other atrocities that enraged them, but the heroic resistance put up against them by the organised volunteers of the people led by the working class of Alleppey. The hostility of the Congress leadership to the heroic defence put up by the working class led by the Communist Party at Punnapra and Vayalar was the one factor which helped the Government in beating back the people's movement for democracy.

The long-range consequence of this betrayal by the Congress leadership however was not what either the Government or the Congress leadership had hoped for. Though confused for the time being, the people in general began gradually to see that what was crushed in Ambalapuzha and Shertalai Taluks was not merely the working class and its political party but the vanguard of the democratic movement. For, they saw that it was after Punnapra and Vayalar that the Government started its attack on the State Congress itself. As against the Congress which wanted Travancore to accede to Indian Union and to introduce Responsible Government, Sir C. P. raised the slogan of "Independent Travancore" with no Responsible Government. The people therefore began to organise themselves for a struggle against the Government. Student struggles started in various parts of Travancore. The militant rank and file of the Congress started organising Committees of Action to effectively lead the struggle for Responsible Government. The leadership of the State Congress itself was forced not only to start preparations for a new struggle but also to contact the underground Communist leadership to

give a militant character to that struggle. It was this new round of struggles that forced the Government to announce the end of Dewan Rule and the establishment of Responsible Government.

As in 1938, the Government of Cochin followed a different policy. It announced that it was expanding the scope of the constitutional reforms introduced in 1938 and throwing open all departments minus Finance and Home to the administration of elected ministers responsible to the Legislature. While thus trying to win over the compromising leadership of the Praja Mandalam, which of course accepted the "Reforms", the Government attacked all the genuinely democratic elements in the Praja Mandalam as well as all the leftists including the Communist Party. A reign of terror was unleashed in Anthikkad, the area in which the Toddy Tappers' Union under Communist leadership had become the spearhead of the people's movement. Other sections of the democratic movement like the students were also attacked. This attack was finally directed against the Praja Mandalam itself, its ministers being forced out of the ministry by the stooges of the Palace. This however could not last long because, in the conditions of the general democratic upsurge of the post-war years, the demand for democratic rule could not be resisted; Responsible Government had ultimately to be conceded in Cochin as well.

It was in these years of the post-war upsurge that the Communist Party began to come out of the comparative isolation in which it found itself in the 1942-45 period. For, it was the Communist Party which took the most consistently democratic stand on all issues and fought most courageously and with the utmost determination for the demands of the people. Even the most prejudiced anti-Communists began to see that, whenever there was an issue that agitated the people, the Communists were there to champion the interests of the people: S.I.R., Punnapra-Vayalar, North Malabar, Anthikkad, etc. in Kerala, as well as Tebhaga in Bengal, Telengana, Andhra etc. in other parts of India, together with the glorious R.I.N. revolt in Bombay, helped in once again drawing the best anti-imperialist democrats towards the Communists. Particularly significant was the shift taking place inside the Socialist Party, the majority of the 1942 generation of Socialists getting more and more dissatisfied with their leadership and being inclined towards a revolutionary orientation of their policy.

It was in this period of post-war revolutionary upsurge

that the shortcoming of the Communist Party that has been noted earlier, its failure to have a correct approach to the strategy of revolution, became a real hindrance to the development of the revolutionary movement. The character of the mass actions of 1946-47 could not be correctly gauged by the Communist Party, sunk as it was in an outlook which tended to underestimate the role of the working class and peasantry. For example, in the development of the struggle in Travancore, the Party failed to work out a plan of linking up the resistance of the working class of Alleppey with the struggle of the peasantry for land on an all-State scale. So did the Party in Malabar fail to support the peasant struggles of N. Malabar with strike actions of the working class of Malabar. The result was that, though the working class of Ambalapuzha and Shertalai Taluks, the peasants of N. Malabar, the workers and middle class of Cochin, fought heroically, though, in each of these struggles, the Communists stood at the head of the fighters, these separate struggles could not be co-ordinated into a common struggle for People's Democracy.

The ideological root of the Communist Party's shortcoming in the post-war years was their failure to see that the gigantic struggles that had started breaking out towards the end of 1945 were struggles for the realisation of People's Democracy, i.e., for the consistent carrying out of the bourgeois democratic revolution under the leadership not of the bourgeoisie but of the proletariat. The Party failed to see in 1946-47 that a fundamental transformation in agrarian relations had already been put on the agenda; that the vehicles of carrying out these transformations were the revolutionary peasant committees in the villages linked on the one hand with the revolutionary committees of action in factories and, on the other, with similar committees of the petty bourgeoisie and other democratic elements; that, in bringing about these fundamental transformations in agrarian relations, the working class and peasantry would have to beat down the opposition of the reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie; and that this struggle against reactionary elements could be successful only if the utmost reliance was placed on the resourcefulness and initiative of the masses of workers and peasants, on their ability to discover ever newer and newer forms of resistance to the enemy. Failure to see these elements of a qualitatively new political situation made the Communists trail behind the bourgeoisie at a time when the people as a whole had already

started looking up to the Communist Party as an alternative leadership challenging the bourgeoisie.

It should nevertheless be mentioned that, though with an inadequate realisation of the character of the period and of the tasks for the period, the Communist Party was the only force that stood with the people in these struggles. It was the leadership given by the Party that made Punnapra-Vayalar, N. Malabar, Anthikkad, etc., the glorious indications of a new phase in the struggle for independence and democracy—a phase in which the working class and not the bourgeoisie was looked upon as the leader of the people. It was this leadership, given by the working class in the years 1946-47, together with the developments of the last four years, that brought about such a transformation in the political situation that, in the recent elections, the Congress suffered ignominious defeat all over Kerala.

## *Chapter X*

### TOWARDS A UNITED PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC KERALA

(1)

While the national question was, along with the agrarian question, the most powerful force behind the post-war revolutionary upsurge swaying millions of people throughout India, it was this same national question that was diverted into reactionary and disruptive channels by imperialism. The religious twist given to the national question by imperialism gave birth to the cry of Pakistan, led to the most gigantic carnage known to human history and ended up in the creation of two weak States—the Indian Union and Pakistan—both forced to remain satellites of imperialism.

The same effort to use the national question against the democratic movement was made in 1946-47 by the Government of Travancore. Those were the years, as we have seen, in which a mighty mass movement with the two slogans of “Down with the American Model” and “End the Dewan Rule” was shaking the autocratic rule to its foundations. One of the weapons which the Government used against this movement was the national sentiment of the Tamilian people of South Travancore. The holy anger of the common people of Tamilnad against their oppressors, the ruling family of Travancore and its feudal satellites, was successfully diverted into hatred for the nationality of these oppressors. “Down with the Malayalees” was the slogan through which the Tamilian people of South Travancore were rallied against the democratic movement. On this basis was built what was known as the “Independent Travancore” movement, the movement “demanding” that Travancore should not join the Indian Union, a movement which was obviously directed against the unity of the Indian democratic movement. Though it was a movement which was formally an “all-Travancore” movement, it was only

among the Tamilians in South Travancore that it had some mass basis.

While the Government of Travancore was thus utilising the national aspirations of the Tamilian people of South Travancore, the Government of Cochin was doing the same in respect of the national aspirations of the Malayalees. The first half year of 1946 saw in Cochin the same democratic upsurge as was then being witnessed in Travancore; the demand for Responsible Government was rallying behind it all sections of the people, as a result of which even the 1942 gulf between the Communists and the rest of the democratic camp was being bridged. Joint rallies, demonstrations, etc., were being organised to voice this united demand and it was precisely on the day fixed for an all-Cochin demonstration—July 29, 1946—a day on which a General Strike of the working class and a Hartal of the merchants were to be organised throughout the State—that the Maharaja of Cochin came out with an announcement that (1) he was in perfect sympathy with the people's demand for Responsible Government and was taking steps to introduce it, and that (2) it was his cherished desire to work towards merging Cochin in a United Kerala province. The Maharaja's announcement, however, significantly added that in introducing Responsible Government and in establishing a United Kerala, all the hereditary honours and privileges of the ruling families should be preserved.

This was hailed as an "inspiring lead" by the bourgeois leadership of the national movement not only in Cochin but throughout Kerala. The K.P.C.C., the Cochin Praja Mandalam and the Travancore State Congress declared in one voice that they were going to work towards the realisation of the objective set before them by the magnanimous Maharaja. They, in consultation with several other organisations, set up a United Kerala Committee and began preparations for a United Kerala Convention which was actually held in April 1947 under the chairmanship of the President of the K.P.C.C. It was naturally inaugurated by the Maharaja of Cochin who became the patron of the United Kerala movement.

Having thus successfully won over the goodwill of the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, the Government of Cochin started an offensive against the democratic movement—first of all, of course, against its vanguard but gradually against the entire movement. This has already been referred to in the last chapter. It need only be mentioned

here that it was because of the cunning manoeuvres of the authorities in Cochin on the issue of Responsible Government and United Kerala that, even when such an offensive was started, a big section of the democrats remained loyal to the Maharaja. Even when the Praja Mandalam ministers were thrown out of office, it was explained as being due to the machinations of the people surrounding the Maharaja and not of the Maharaja himself. Thus was the anti-feudal democratic edge of the movement blunted.

Furthermore, the very interpretation given by the United Kerala Movement under the patronage of the Maharaja was as disruptive of the unity of the Indian democratic movement as the "Down with the Malayalees" movement in South Travancore. For, what the bourgeois leadership of the United Kerala Movement wanted was not the unification of the contiguous areas of Madras, Cochin and Travancore wherein the Malayalam-speaking people form the majority, but the carving out of a multilingual province on the West Coast. In this "United Kerala" should be included, they demanded, not only the Tamil areas of South Travancore but other non-Malayalee areas like the northern, Tulu-and-Canarese-majority parts of South Kanara, Coorg and Tamil and tribal areas of the Nilgiris. This naturally roused intense indignation among the Tamilians, Kannadigas and the people of Coorg.

This chauvinistic interpretation of United Kerala was based on the falsified "history" of Kerala according to which the ancient Empire of Kerala stretched from Cape Comorin in the South to Gokarnam in the North. It is significant that the Maharaja of Cochin's announcement on United Kerala spoke of that ancient Empire of Kerala whose restoration in all its glory was set before the people as the grand objective to be attained. It is also significant that the United Kerala Convention held in April 1947 paid tribute, by the erection of a statue before the Convention pandal, to the mythological hero, Parasurama, the traditional creator of Kerala from the Cape to Gokarnam. We have seen in earlier chapters how false are the theories of history based on Parasurama's creation of Kerala and how these theories have their origin in the feudal-militarist ruling classes of mediaeval Kerala. That it was on this false theory of history that the bourgeois organisers of the United Kerala movement based themselves shows the utterly reactionary character of their leadership over the movement.

Despite this, however, the movement rallied the democratic elements of Kerala. Although resenting the domination of the feudal element headed by the Maharaja of Cochin, democratic sections of the people enthusiastically participated in the United Kerala Convention. The United Kerala Committee set up to continue the work of the Convention also became the rallying centre of a large number of democratic organisations and groups. Never before in the history of Kerala had the slogan of United Kerala assumed such wide mass support. It seemed as if everybody was for United Kerala.

Behind this apparent unity for a United Kerala, however, appeared very serious rifts which became more and more wide as days passed. The ruling family of Travancore and its satellites were opposed to United Kerala since it would lead to an undermining of their authority, at least to some extent; they were also determined that the Tamilians of South Travancore should not be allowed to join their brethren in the Madras part of Tamilnad. The bourgeoisie of Travancore was also anxious to keep the Tamilnad part of Travancore inside United Kerala but they would not give up their demand for United Kerala if, in realising it, they had to relinquish the Tamil areas. The bourgeoisie of Cochin and Malabar were anxious to see Kerala united but were at the same time afraid that United Kerala would be dominated by the economically stronger and politically better organised bourgeoisie of Travancore. It was these conflicts among the ruling classes of Kerala as well as the conflicts between the ruling classes of Kerala on the one hand and of the neighbouring nationalities on the other, that were fully utilised by the Government of India and its States Ministry to bring the States of Cochin and Travancore fully under its control and to smash the demand for United Kerala.

When the Government of India and the States Ministry initiated their policy of integration and merger of Indian States, Travancore and Cochin were among those few States excluded from this process on the ground that they were "viable" States, like Mysore, Kashmir and Hyderabad. But, as integration and merger of "non-viable" States were well on the point of being successfully ended, the question arose of bringing them also under the full control of the States Ministry. This was an important question for the additional reason that the democratic movement had already raised the slogan of uniting these two States with Malabar to form United Kerala. The States

Ministry therefore conceived the plan of uniting these two States to form a new State, the Travancore-Cochin State.

This was boosted before the champions of United Kerala as "the first step" in the direction of realising their goal; it was under this false plea that a section of the democratic people in Cochin and Travancore was made to accept it. As a matter of fact, however, it was a step, not in the direction of, but away from, the realisation of United Kerala. For, not only did it continue the multilingual character of the new State of Travancore-Cochin, not only did it continue the division of the Tamilian and Malayalee peoples into those living in the State of Madras and in the new State of Travancore-Cochin; it at the same time perpetuated the rule of the Maharaja of Travancore as the Rajpramukh of the new State and provided for the payment of nearly Rupees 40 lakhs per year as allowances to the two ruling families of Travancore and Cochin. The Covenant which was drawn up as the basis for the formation of the new State and which was made part of the new Constitution of India made Travancore-Cochin a Part B State in whose affairs the Government of India has extensive powers of interference and control.

With this ended one phase of the struggle for United Kerala, the phase in which there was some hope that, if the people remained united, they could make the Government of India itself implement the slogan of United Kerala. It should be borne in mind that that was the time when the All-India leadership of the Congress had to resort to various stratagems like the appointment of the Dhar Commission, the publication of its Report, its further examination by the J. V. P. Committee, etc. to sidetrack the people from the formation of linguistic states. The inauguration of the new Constitution of India in 1950, followed as it was by the unification of Travancore and Cochin into one State, put new obstacles in the way of United Kerala. The modification of the Covenant of unification of Travancore and Cochin, the transformation of the new Travancore-Cochin from the status of a Part B State to that of a Part A State, the agreement of the Indian Parliament as well as the Legislatures of Madras and Travancore-Cochin States—these extremely difficult processes had to be gone through if a United Kerala State was to be formed. The United Kerala movement under bourgeois leadership therefore died a natural death; the United Kerala Committee which functioned for a couple of years was liquidated.

## (2)

Though the United Kerala movement under bourgeois leadership was thus disrupted, the democratic upsurge out of which that movement arose did not cease. It, on the other hand, grew stronger and stronger as years passed.

It was in the midst of the biggest wave of mass actions going to their highest forms in Punnapra-Vayalar and North Malabar that the K.P.C.C.-sponsored United Kerala Movement grew. The brutal terror that was unleashed to suppress the common people who participated in these actions was ineffective. For, though for a time it succeeded in establishing a deathly calm in Ambalapuzha-Shertalai Taluks and in North Malabar, it ultimately ended up in releasing a far bigger wave of mass actions. In less than a year after the sanguinary massacre of Vayalar, tens of thousands of throats shouted: "Vayalar blood is our blood", "Release the heroes of Punnapra-Vayalar", "Try, and punish the police officers who murdered at Vayalar", etc. Not only Communists, but Socialists, Congressmen, all democrats, took the cause of Punnapra-Vayalar as their own. So too did Karivellore and Kavumpayi in North Malabar (the two places where peasants were shot dead in Chirakkal Taluk) become symbolic of the new phase of the struggle for land and democracy. The prestige and popularity of the Communist Party, the leader and organiser of these revolutionary actions, grew as never before.

The first elections to the Legislatures of Travancore and Cochin which took place in February and September, 1948 respectively showed that the left and democratic forces were uniting against the Congress. The Communist Party and the newly formed Kerala Socialist Party (a Party composed of the majority of the Congress Socialists in Kerala recruited in the years after 1942) formed a united front in Travancore to fight the Congress. They also united in boycotting the elections in Cochin. There was also an internal agreement between these two parties on the one hand and the Travancore Tamilnad Congress in South Travancore.

Though the candidates of the Communist and K.S.P. United Front in Travancore did not secure a single seat, their joint campaign served to educate the people in the task of fighting for real democracy. Furthermore, the fact that they secured over 2 lakh out of a total of over 20 lakh votes polled, added to the fact that out of the balance, over 5 lakh were

polled by the Travancore Tamilnad Congress, showed that there was a solid mass basis for the struggle against the Congress.

Similarly in Cochin, though the boycott of the elections was comparatively ineffective, the campaign that the two parties together carried on against the Praja Mandalam and the People's Congress (an organisation of the stooges of the Palace) served to show that a new force was arising to fight reactionaries of all hues. Far more effective, of course, it would have been if, as in Travancore, the two parties together had jointly fought the election and consolidated the democratic forces. But the fact that they pursued the same policy in fighting reaction was a significant development since it indicated, as did the joint participation in the Travancore election, the emergence of a united revolutionary opposition.

Meanwhile, extra-parliamentary struggles were also breaking out on a big scale. Special mention should be made of two of these struggles.

*First*, the *Paliyam Satyagraha* to assert the right of untouchables to walk along certain roads that were prohibited to them. This was significant in two respects. Firstly, it was directed against the biggest landlord in Cochin and, therefore, struck as sympathetic a chord among the touchable peasants as among the untouchables; it was in fact the first big mass action of the peasantry against feudal landlords, though it was not fought on a directly agrarian issue. Secondly, being directed against the most decadent, the most barbarous form of caste separatism, it rallied the progressives of all castes: among the satyagrahis who braved the lathis of the police were boys and girls of the highest castes, including members of the ruling families of the State. It had the support of all the caste organisations, all the political parties (including local committees of the Congress) and several individuals. It is significant that a Communist leader of the harbour workers of Cochin, Com. A. G. Velayudhan, died at the hands of the police while leading a squad of working-class volunteers to the scene of Satyagraha. Here was therefore that combination of the struggle for social equality, the struggle against landlordism, the mobilisation of all democrats and progressives and the leadership in action of the working class, which is the essence of the struggle for a United Democratic Kerala.

*The second struggle* that should be specially mentioned is the *glorious struggle of the North Malabar peasantry*. This, as is well-known, was the most determined action which the

rural poor of North Malabar resorted to against the landlord hoarders. It unleashed such an unprecedented mass force, the people who participated in it showing such a high degree of militancy and resourcefulness, that the Government had to call out the military to crush it. Korome, Payassi, Thillengeri, Onchiyam, Munayamkunnu—these became the symbols of a new phase in the history of our peasant movement, the phase in which the organised peasantry, under Communist leadership, relied on its own strength to defeat its class enemy.

These struggles were however conducted at a time when the Congress still had the halo of the biggest if not the only national organisation in the country. Congress had got full power at the Centre only a few weeks before; it was on the eve of getting power in Travancore and Cochin. A good chunk of honest democrats therefore felt that Congress should be given time and that the Communists were unnecessarily creating trouble for the Congress and its Government. This view was shared by sections of the peasantry and working class itself. It was this genuine anxiety of sections of the democratic people to give time to the Congress Government that the Congress utilised against the fighting vanguard of the people, the Communist Party.

This attitude however was an extremely short-term affair. For people began to see that Congressmen in power did not mean people's representatives in power but corrupt and greedy men trying to loot the people through their grip over the State machinery. Permits, bus routes, assignment of lands, filling of all offices with the minister's own men, creation of new jobs to give employment to the Congress stooges—these were added to the increase in the price of rice, successive breakdowns of the rationing system, squeezing of the poor peasant in the name of procurement, unrestricted blackmarket, endless repression, etc. People began to see further that the limitless greed and selfishness of Congressmen had started the process of internal squabbles among them, squabbles on the issue of dividing the loot. Group after group of Congress sympathisers got disgusted when they saw minister after minister, M.L.A. after M.L.A., intriguing against each other. Newspaper columns, trains and buses, shops and offices, every place where people had an opportunity to talk, became places for expressing extreme indignation at what was happening and hatred and contempt for the "national organisation" and its leaders.

This was naturally sought to be utilised by reactionaries

of all sorts and colours. The Catholic hierarchy in Travancore and Cochin, Hindu reaction, different factions in the Congress, all took advantage of the anti-Congress sentiment in order to pull down their adversaries from seats of power and to secure their own narrow, sectional interests. Organisations like the Hindu Mandalam, the Cochin Party etc. grew up. The large mass of the people however rejected these reactionary parties and their false slogans and rallied round the Communist Party and other democratic parties and organisations. It is remarkable that, in the first municipal elections that took place in Cochin after the Congress Ministry took office (the elections of December, 1948), the Communists secured a sizable percentage of seats. It is also remarkable that the first Communist elected to the Cochin State Legislature, early in 1949, was Com. Gopalakrishna Menon who was underground at that time. And by 1950, when a series of by-elections took place in Travancore-Cochin State, Congress had become so discredited that it lost most of the seats.

One indication of the process of disillusionment that was taking place among the people was the growth of a new generation of Socialists (in place of the 1942-45 generation, the majority of whom had left the Socialist Party to form the K.S.P. and started joint work with the Communists) as well as the origin and development of what later became the K.M.P. Party. For, it was when the genuinely democratic rank and file of the Congress began to get disgusted with their own organisation, when however they had not yet cast off their ideological and political prejudices against the Communist Party, that they started seeking out new forms of organisation for their activity. The development of these parties in the last two years is therefore an indication that, instead of the Congress succeeding in isolating the vanguard from the masses of the democratic movement, Congress is itself getting isolated from the masses.

The factor that proved decisive in the situation however was the leading role played by the Communist Party. For, it was the Communist Party which, after an initial phase of considering the National Congress a part of the anti-imperialist movement even after the August 15 transfer of power, undertook the extensive popularisation of the slogan: "Replace the Congress Government by a People's Democratic Government". It was again the Communist Party which stood at the head of the fighting people in a series of major and minor

struggles, such as the Paliyam Satyagraha, the North Malabar Struggle, the September (1948) strike of the Travancore students, several struggles of the industrial and agricultural labourers, etc. The Party penetrated into several new areas and built up the democratic movement in spite of the tremendous difficulties it had to face in doing so. All these activities provoked unprecedented repression involving the imprisonment of over 3,000 Party members and sympathisers, the arrest and beating up of several hundreds, and other unspeakable atrocities on the part of the police. Enemies of the Party thought, as they had thought in 1940 and 1946, that the Party was completely smashed; friends of the Party and even sections of the Party membership thought that the Party had gone too far in leading struggles. It was however proved by the subsequent demonstration of popular support for the Party, the tremendous mass response when the leaders of the Party came out of jail in 1951, that, just as on earlier occasions, repression against the Party had, far from weakening, strengthened the Party.

It does not, of course, follow from this that the Party committed no mistakes in leading these struggles. Mistakes were undoubtedly committed both of a strategical and a tactical nature; the Party swung from the original mistake of over-estimating the role of the bourgeoisie in colonial revolutions to the new mistake of totally denying that role; in the process of correcting the earlier mistake of underestimating the leading role of the working class, the Party committed the equally serious mistake of denying the role of the peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie, denying the crucial importance of the anti-imperialist national factor, virtually denying the fact that British imperialism still had its grip over India. Mistakes were also committed in the direction of underestimating the role of parliamentary work in further advancing the democratic movement, equating the gradual process of mass disillusionment with the Congress which was taking place with the already completed process of the isolation of the Congress from the people; advancing forms of struggle for which the masses were not yet ready etc.

In spite of these mistakes, however, it is an undisputed fact that the Party was going in the general direction of replacing the present Congress Government, by a People's Democratic Government. That is why, both in Malabar and Travancore-Cochin, the Party is today considered the most poli-

tically experienced, the most well-organised Party, the Party that is best fitted to act as the leader of a new combination of the democratic masses, the People's Democratic Front.

(3)

The anti-Congress democratic mobilisation that Kerala witnessed in the latter half of 1951 and in the beginning of 1952 is too recent to need description in detail. It is enough to note that in having joined the people's democratic movements of the rest of South India in reducing the Congress into the position of a minority party, Kerala has paved the way not only for replacing the present Congress Government of India by a People's Democratic Government but also for replacing the now defunct movement of a bourgeois-led United Kerala movement by a new movement for United People's Democratic Kerala.

For, Kerala saw in this new upsurge two forces ranged against each other. On one side were the forces of princedom, landlordism, Christian and Hindu reaction, bureaucratic corruption etc., all covered under the white caps worn by the Congressmen. Behind them stood also the cunning imperialist enslavers of the world—Churchill, Truman & Co. who want the rich fields and valleys of our beautiful land to be looted to their hearts' content. On the other side were our common people—workers, peasants, middle classes, those sections of the bourgeoisie and feudal ruling classes who want our country to be free, happy and prosperous.

And it was the latter that won and the former that were defeated when, both in Travancore-Cochin and Malabar, the Congress, the ruling party, was declared a minority party both in regard to the percentage of votes polled and the seats secured by it. Out of a total of 33,41,767 votes polled in Travancore-Cochin, Congress got only 11,95,943, i.e., 36.6 per cent; while in Malabar it got only 3,02,353 out of 11,37,335. As for seats, Congress got 44 out of 108 in Travancore-Cochin and 4 out of 30 in Malabar. Kerala had thus the honour of being bracketed with Andhra, Telengana, Tripura State and certain districts of Tamilnad in having dealt a powerful blow against reaction and for People's Democracy.

This anti-Congress democratic mobilisation of the people however had the very serious shortcoming that it was not

united. The Socialist Party, true to its tradition of disrupting every democratic mass movement, refused to ally with any other party and in the process handed over several seats to the Congress. A similar anti-unity stand was taken by the Muslim League in Malabar as well as several independents and some small parties in Travancore-Cochin. It was, in fact, a case of several parties, groups and individuals trying to make capital for themselves out of the prevailing anti-Congress sentiment. Most of them were, of course, ignominiously defeated, but their refusal to have a united front with other anti-Congress democratic parties caused tremendous damage to the democratic camp.

Moreover, there were acute differences on fundamental and tactical questions among such parties as agreed to unite for the purpose of defeating the Congress at the polls. The K.S.P. and R.S.P., for example, insisted that the United Front should be confined to *left* parties, parties that accepted Socialism. They violently objected to bringing in the K.M.P. Party and other bourgeois nationalists into united front, because, they said, the struggle today is for Socialism and against the bourgeoisie as a class. In this, they are in perfect agreement with the Socialists who claim too that they stand for the immediate introduction of Socialism, though they do not agree with the Socialists in rejecting a united front with the Communists. Furthermore, the K.S.P. insists that the programme on which a united front has to be built should be one for an Independent Kerala, i.e., a Kerala which is independent of the rest of India. The K.M.P. Party for its part has serious differences with the Communists, K.S.P. and R.S.P., since they owe allegiance to Sarvodaya and cannot therefore countenance the revolutionary programme of these parties owing allegiance to Marxism.

In spite of not seeing eye to eye with the K.S.P., R.S.P. and K.M.P.P. on these issues, the Communist Party did its best to come to a working arrangement with them. Popularising its own fundamental programme as laid down by the Central Committee as well as its own Election Manifestos (central and provincial), the Party started negotiations with the K.M.P.P. to work out an agreed minimum programme and ultimately succeeded in its efforts. A similar effort in relation to the K.S.P. and R.S.P. proved futile because these parties insisted on their fundamental programme of Socialism being made the basis of *any* United Front. This difference

on the issue of a minimum programme is bound to lead to serious conflicts in the future, as it has already done on the issue of the formation of a non-Congress ministry in Travancore-Cochin. The K.S.P. and R.S.P. are opposed to the formation of a non-Congress ministry unless it can be done by a combination of "left" parties getting a majority in the Legislature while the Communists want a ministry of all those who accept a minimum programme.

It will be a hard task for the Communist Party in these circumstances to so develop the United Front already built up as to draw all anti-imperialist, anti-feudal classes, parties, organisations, groups and individuals into it. The Party will have to carry on a simultaneous struggle against right reformism and left sectarianism in its own ranks; to combine a firm ideological struggle against alien trends as represented by the K.S.P., R.S.P. and K.M.P.P. with the practical day-to-day work based on a united front in action with them; to carry on a firm, consistent struggle against the disruptive leaderships of other parties like the Muslim League, Socialist Party, Travancore Tamilnad Congress etc. so as to draw their ranks towards the United Front; to develop a systematic campaign among rank and file Congressmen themselves so as to further isolate the reactionary Congress leadership, etc. For, the results of the elections have made it amply clear that, though the Congress received a serious blow at the hands of the electorate, it is still powerful enough to be able to prevent the formation of a democratic non-Congress Government.

The *Programme* and *Statement of Policy* of the Communist Party which the Political Bureau and later the Central Committee and the All-India Party Conference adopted as well as the *Election Manifesto* of the Central Committee are powerful weapons in the hands of Communists in carrying out these tasks. And the encouraging results of the elections are a clear pointer to them that they can win greater successes in the direction of rallying all genuine anti-imperialist, anti-feudal elements around a programme of People's Democracy if they persist in carrying on their work as energetically as till now. It is only this that will enable them to take a leading role in building a United Democratic Kerala.

## (4)

One of the indications of the irresistible force of the movement for a United People's Democratic Kerala is the great cultural upsurge sweeping over our entire people—men, women and children of all classes and walks of life.

The years after the end of the Second World War have seen the emergence of hundreds of new poets, short story-writers, literary critics, actors, singers, etc. A considerable number of these new men and women of culture are drawn from among the workers and peasants while a good number of their creations are devoted to various themes connected with the struggle for social reform, national independence, political democracy, and improvement in the standard of living of the people.

A rough calculation made by the present writer, on the basis of the number of poems and short stories that appeared in some of the leftist weeklies in the course of 1951 alone, makes it possible to say that, together with the poems and stories printed in other weeklies and monthlies and with those that are published in booklet form, no less than 2,000 poems and 200 short stories have been published in 1951 dealing with the various aspects of the struggle for a United People's Democratic Kerala as their theme. This is exclusive of the hundreds of poems and songs which were composed and sung during the election campaign, of which it is difficult to estimate the number even approximately. Every village, in fact, had its own poets who composed, its own singers who sang these poems and songs. At no period in the history of our people have so many poems and songs been composed by so many people, that too by the toiling people, including factory workers, agricultural labourers and members of the scheduled castes.

This is also true with regard to other fields of culture, like the drama and other allied arts, of which there is in fact a regular flood all over Kerala. Dozens of local squads have been organised, hundreds of actors have been selected and performances attended by tens of thousands of people have been staged in every nook and corner of Kerala. An overwhelming majority of these squads and performances is connected with the trade unions, kisan sabhas and other mass organisations or with the democratic political parties, and it is the awakened working class and peasantry that have been drawn into these cultural performances.

The circle of literary criticism and the study of the various branches of science have also grown far wider than ever before. As a matter of fact one can find today that factory and agricultural workers have started taking an interest in all those fields of knowledge which till a generation ago were the close preserve of intellectuals drawn from, or closely allied with, the ruling classes. The result is that periodicals and magazines dedicated to these subjects and having a progressive democratic outlook to guide them have come to secure a far larger circulation than similar publications with no progressive democratic outlook.

As in the other spheres of the People's Democratic Movement, it is the Communist Party that leads this cultural upsurge. It was in fact the Party, which at that time was in the process of evolution within the framework of the Congress Socialist Party, that in 1937, for the first time, resolutely opposed the ruling class slogan of "Art for art's sake" with the slogan of "Art for the people". It was in 1937 that Communist authors produced various dramas and Communist actors staged them, the most celebrated of these being *Arrears of Rent* depicting agrarian struggles and *Drinking of Blood*, depicting working class struggles. This was taken to a higher level in 1942-45 when hundreds of songs, poems, dramas etc. were composed on the theme of the anti-fascist war, national liberation, the fight against famine, etc. This was also the time when it was shown in practice that various forms of folk culture (like the Kummi, Kolatam, Ottamthullal, Purakkali, etc.) can be given a progressive democratic content and made the vehicles of popular enlightenment and entertainment. It is again the Communist Party that, in the post-war years, took the lead in making the various forms of culture serve the cause of people's struggle, so that Communist writers, singers, actors, literary critics, writers of serious scientific works, etc. have come to occupy a well-established position in the world of Kerala's culture.

It would, however, be wrong to equate the new cultural upsurge with the cultural activities of the Communist Party. For, apart from other Left and democratic parties there are also Congressmen, Right Socialists and other avowedly anti-Communist people who are using culture in order to advance their own cause. As a matter of fact, every political party, every social or other organisation, is today using culture in its own respective interests. Thus has arisen, and is arising, a

large section of men and women of culture who are using culture for what they think is the best interests of the people. It is, therefore, natural that, as the process of disillusionment embraces greater and greater sections of the people, as more and more Leftists and Democrats give up their illusions and come to take the Communist stand, as more and more Socialists, Congressmen, etc. give up their present line and accept the policy of the United Democratic Front, the circle of men and women of People's Democratic Culture will also get wider.

It would be equally wrong to consider that all the cultural activities of the Communist Party are such as will help the development of a People's Democratic Culture. For, just as in the other fields of activity, so in the field of culture, the Party has committed, and is likely to commit, mistakes of an opportunist or a sectarian character. It has, therefore, to be extremely vigilant on the one hand, against the tendency to underestimate the role of the working class and peasantry as the builders of People's Democratic Culture, and on the other hand, against the tendency to ignore the role of the intelligentsia as allies of the working class and peasantry in developing Democratic Culture. These two tendencies have already expressed, and are even today expressing, themselves in the form of either kow-towing to the bourgeois "experts" of culture or of treating the progressive sections among them as enemies. Only by steering itself clear of these twin dangers can the Party play its leading role of developing a broad People's Democratic Culture, basing itself primarily on the cultural activities of, and among, the working class and the peasantry. Such a correct leadership of the Party in the cultural field will be a powerful weapon in the struggle for a United People's Democratic Kerala.

THE END



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